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**The ruler and the ruled: Complicating a theory of teaching autonomy**

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# The ruler and the ruled: Complicating a theory of teaching autonomy

by

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**Dissertation**

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# Dedication

*This dissertation is dedicated to all public school teachers, and one in particular, Vivienne Marie Lepine, my mother. Mrs. Lepine is a retired counselor and special education teacher who worked in the public school system in central Texas.*

## Acknowledgements

I first have to acknowledge my family, Keegan and Matt Kjeldsen, for the support they have given me during this journey. My extended family has also been very understanding of the time commitments required of this process. Next, I am indebted to Dr. Stuart Reifel for taking on the chair responsibilities over this dissertation. Considering that he stepped out of his comfort zone to support my study of teaching autonomy through the lens of a student in the Educational Policy and Planning program, rather than Curriculum and Instruction, I am deeply grateful. His encouragement, patience and insight were invaluable as I wrestled with how to present my research. Along with Dr. Reifel, Dr. Terry Clark gave much needed perspective to the findings reported in Chapter Four. Dr. Clark helped with the quantitative item analysis and offered advice to increase the coherence of the findings that made this a much better and tighter analysis. I would also like to thank my principal, Sheila P. Anderson, for allowing me to pursue my doctorate while employed fulltime. I feel very fortunate to work closely with a school leader whose "espoused theories" match her "theories in use" and her support and mentoring are indicative of her strong and effective leadership. I hope to be more like her when I grow up. Last, I want to acknowledge the help and support from all of my colleagues, friends, and fellow students who have assisted me, in both large and small ways, to achieve my goal.

**The ruler and the ruled: Complicating a theory of teaching autonomy**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2007

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This study was designed to compare teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy at two economically diverse elementary school campuses to determine factors that influence teachers' perceptions of their ability and authority to make important decisions regarding their classrooms and students. Using a quantitative measure developed by Pearson & Hall (1993), the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS), fifty teachers, twenty-five from each campus, rated their teaching autonomy. The TAS served as a sorting and selecting tool to place teachers in two cohorts: low and high teaching autonomy. From these cohorts, ten teachers were selected to participate in an interview and discussed factors that influence their individual authority in making important classroom decisions. Teachers also discussed actions of resistance and conformity to mandates, reform initiatives and policies, which influence their ability to exercise teaching autonomy.

Previous research has defined teaching autonomy as a measurable and quantifiable construct (Pearson & Hall; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), as well as a professionally conferred characteristic awarded the teaching professional upon completion of the degree and meeting the licensing requirements for public school educator. Findings of this study point to teaching autonomy as a state of being that is best

understood through a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1966; Mead, 1934) and role-identity theory (McCall & Simons, 1966). The findings indicated a need for a different conceptualization of teaching autonomy. An original grounded theory is proposed that describes teaching autonomy as a series of identities, which are by nature transitory and shifting, rather than as a fixed score on a set of indicators. Further complicating this theory are the varying governance structures in schools that contribute to teachers taking both active and passive roles when exercising authority over the decisions important to the classroom. Schools that operate democratically, as learning organizations, cultivate teaching autonomy and value the professional input of teachers concerning decisions that impact the classroom and student achievement. Schools that operate bureaucratically do not necessarily value a teacher's input into decision-making. Additionally, teachers in the study acted autocratically regarding their teaching autonomy and made decisions in isolation, even in a tightly coupled policy environment. Governance structures influenced the teachers' selection of two roles, ruler or ruled and eight identities were described by teachers in the study they used when exerting or deferring individual authority over the top-down decisions imposed by external authorities. The role identity theory presented by the author offers a better explanation of how teachers enacted and described the phenomenon of teaching autonomy at their campuses than does previous research. Implications for future research, for school leaders and for policy are based on the conclusion that teaching autonomy is state of being that must be understood from an interactionist perspective alongside the characteristics of the teachers' workplace.

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# Glossary of Terms

*Accountability* - emphasizes measuring student performance on standardized tests and assigning responsibility for results (Pipho, 1989).

*Agency* - the capacity teachers have to make choices and to impose those choices on their environment

*Autonomy* **-** the freedom to act and make decisions regarding your professional practice

*Teaching Autonomy* **-** the freedom to make important classroom decisions in two dimensions as described below**:**

- *Curricular Autonomy* - related to the teacher's perception that she is able to make important instructional decisions based on student needs and whether she has freedom from outside control when making these decisions (Pearson & Hall, 1993).
- *General Autonomy* - relates to factors that show whether a teacher perceives the freedom to utilize creative methods and to her perception of whether she has control over student work habits and her overall work environment (Pearson & Hall, 1993).

*Authority* - the power to make decisions and the freedom to act on those decisions

*Efficacy* - "the belief that teachers have about their skills and abilities to create desirable outcomes for students" (Tucker et al., 2005, p. 29)

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* - mandates state testing of children in grades three through eight, in language, reading and math in addition to multiple other accountability standards (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004).

*Professionalism* - “the movement to upgrade the status, training and working conditions of teachers” (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

*Professionalization* - the movement to require teachers to meet licensing and credentialing requirements and to be highly qualified and certified to teach in the subject of assignment

*Social Reproduction Theory* **-** an idea that our children are schooled in a manner that will prepare them to take their place in the stratified class system set up by our capitalist economy (Giroux, 1982; McLaren, 2003)

*Student Achievement* – in this study is defined by performance on standardized tests of achievement and on learning specific behavioral objectives that can be measured (Spring, 1997).

# Chapter One: Introduction

The twenty-first century, American public school system has evolved into a complex world of accountability where teachers must comply with federal education policy that has the power to dictate local practice. Since the profession's humble beginnings, teachers have always been exposed to external pressures to alter their practice, swaying pedagogical decisions in the direction of the political pendulum (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Spring, 1997). Current education policy has focused the attention of national, state, and district level education professionals, business community members, legislators, parents and the general public on the performance of teachers in this era of accountability to federal policy. These various stakeholders are once again looking to teachers as one explanation of why children in this nation have been left behind. The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a piece of legislation that serves to define the measure of student progress through a score on a standardized test. When students do not achieve on state tests of accountability as directed by the federal law, schools and teachers fall under "the gaze" (Foucault, 1979) and are targeted for reforms and sanctions as outlined in the policy. Undoubtedly, teachers do play a critical role in fostering the achievement of their students (Ashton & Webb 1986; Brophy & Good, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Tucker et al, 2005) and are a key element of any reform. But, in an environment where the nationally sanctioned measure of student achievement is a single score on a test, how does this definition of achievement impact teachers' daily practice and personal beliefs about their role as educators? This study will explore teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy, the ability to act and make decisions regarding their professional practice, in

this climate of control and accountability to high-stakes testing required by NCLB policy mandates.

*Definition of Teaching Autonomy*

Teaching autonomy is not a single trait and is defined for this research by the work of Pearson & Hall (1993) and Pearson & Moomaw (2005) who proposed and validated an instrument for measuring perceptions of teaching autonomy. The researchers designed the Teaching Autonomy Scale, which measures two types of autonomy: general and curricular. In their research they found general teaching autonomy relates to factors that show whether a teacher perceives the freedom to utilize creative methods and to her perception of whether she has control over student work habits and her overall work environment. Curricular autonomy is related to the teacher's perception that she is able to make important instructional decisions based on student needs and whether she has freedom from outside control when making these decisions (Pearson & Hall, 1993).

Teaching autonomy defined in this way is typical of professions where experts are viewed as having the ability to make important decisions regarding their work (e.g. doctors and lawyers) (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Therefore, teaching autonomy within the teacher professionalism movement is tied to issues of school governance, which deals directly with how important decisions are made on school campuses (Lessinger, 1970). Weick (1976) problemitized autonomy as a feature of loosely coupled educational organizations. In a loosely coupled school organization, autonomy can be defined as isolated teachers operating a classroom in an independent, noncollaborative manner (Willner, 1990). However, this viewpoint is disputed in the more current research which

identifies autonomy as necessary for a teacher's sense of professionalism (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Blasé & Kirby, 2000, Hanson, 2003) and is tied to feelings of greater job satisfaction, less stress, and more authority in the classroom to make decisions concerning important educational issues (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Grant & Murray, 1999; Kyriacou, 1989). Prior research has also shown perceptions of teaching autonomy are connected to a teacher's belief that she is best qualified and, therefore, should have the authority to make decisions about the instructional process used in her classroom (Elmore, 1987; Fay, 1990, Franklin, 1988; Lortie, 1975). This study continues the efforts of this line of research that defines and describes teaching autonomy as key to teachers' sense of professionalism and will expand our understanding of teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy in this high accountability climate created by NCLB policy.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, I aim to obtain a quantitative measure of teachers' perceived level of teaching autonomy and compare this data to characteristics of the teachers' school assignment in order to test my hypothesis about the relationship between perceived teaching autonomy and school characteristics in the climate created by NCLB policies. Specifically, I posit that schools serving high percentages of students of color, poverty and language difference become sites where teachers have little to no teaching autonomy due to the tightly coupled relationship between the classroom and external sources of control, while teachers at schools serving the gentry class have greater perceived teaching autonomy and less pressure from external sources (Finn, 1999). Second, I want to better understand from the teachers' point of views how the external pressures on schools, what I have conceptualized as competing spheres of influence,

work to influence teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy at both sites and ultimately control the kind of curriculum and learning opportunities a student receives. Therefore, the study was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers about their perceptions of teaching autonomy at two kinds of schools, those serving poverty and working class children and those serving middle and gentry class children to better understand how this aspect of the teachers' work environments influences their perceptions of teaching autonomy and impacts the learning opportunities for students and subsequently, their achievement.

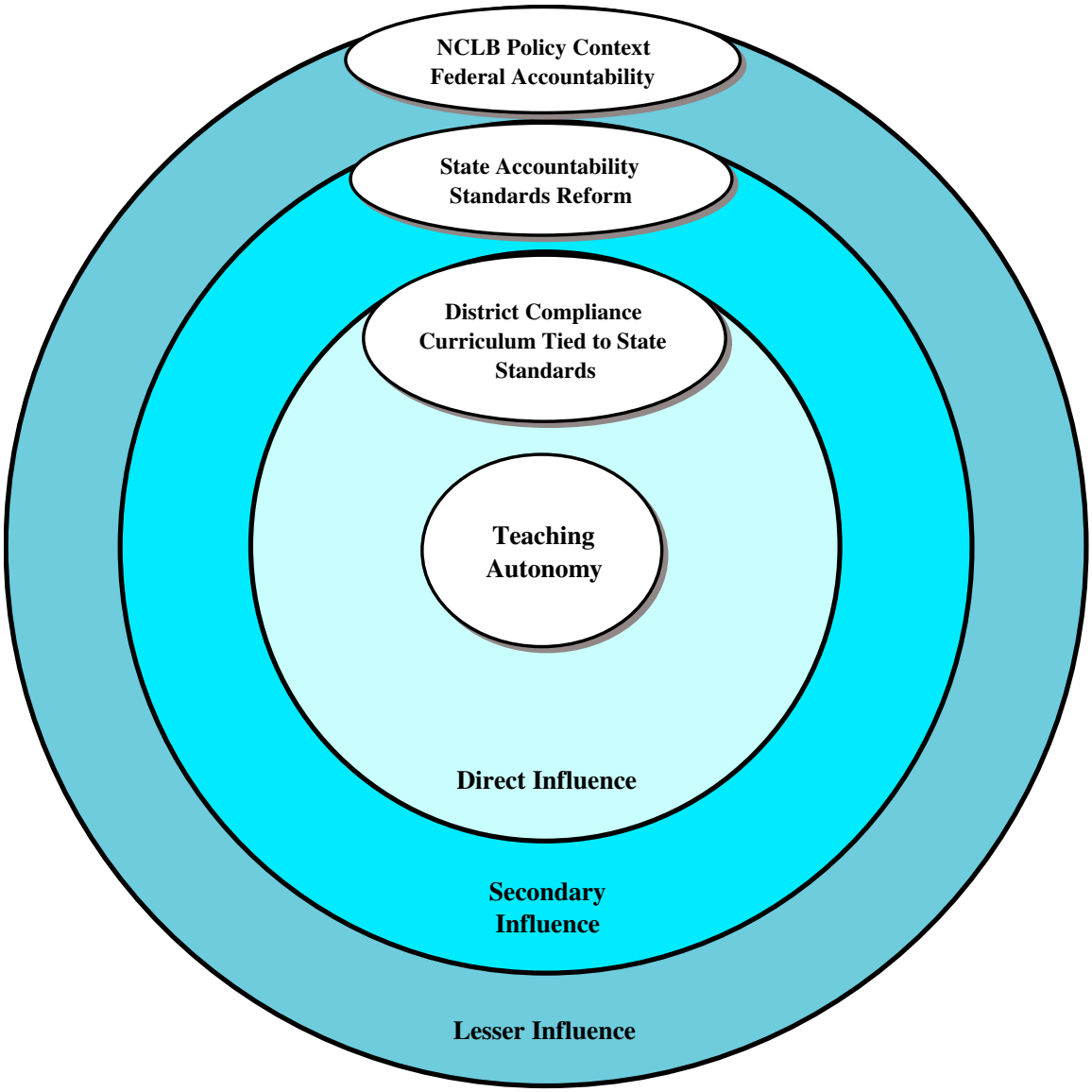
*Background of the Study*

The NCLB reform agenda is a continuation of the business approach to education position that has become entrenched in the education rhetoric, whereby the public school is seen as an inefficient government bureaucracy staffed with teachers who are unaccountable for results (Cohen, 2006; Luke, 2004; Spring, 1997). From this line of thinking, teacher performance is the input, and children's test scores are the outputs through which their education is measured. Teachers who must implement public education policy and school reform agendas are key to the success of any such undertaking. The experiences of teachers in a large urban district serving 80,000 students in the central Texas region will offer a piece of the national narrative that tells the story of how they navigate the policy stream and how it impacts their teaching autonomy. In organizing this study of teaching autonomy, several interrelated issues arise. These issues are presented here briefly and are addressed more in depth in the literature review, in order to provide further background to the research. In the current policy environment, I have conceptualized teaching autonomy as nested inside competing spheres of influence

that put pressure on teachers to conform to policies imposed by these outside forces as illustrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1*.

Spheres of Influence on Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Autonomy



## Macropolitical Influence on Teaching Autonomy

Together and separately, these spheres of influence act on teachers in different ways. The outside sphere, furthest from the classroom is the macropolitical context where federal policy contained in NCLB specifies how schools will be held accountable for student achievement. This policy specifies what will happen to schools that do not show adequate yearly progress (AYP), with funding implications and other sanctions for schools that receive Title I funds. Title I funds are given to schools that meet a percentage requirement of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. In most districts, these are schools that have over fifty percent of students participating in the federal school meal program. To put it simply, these are the schools attended by students of color, poverty and language difference in America. One major criticism of NCLB policy is the underlying message conveyed in the legislation--schools are solely responsible for fixing the achievement gap between America's children. Other gaps these children face in the areas of income, housing, health care, and access to resources are ignored (Kozol, 2005; Rothstein cited in Bracey, 2006;). Schools are expected to single-handedly close the achievement gap by 2014 without the larger social and economic disparities in the nation having been addressed. This sphere has the potential to influence a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy with varying degrees that I assert depend on characteristics of the teacher's school assignment and student population served.

## State Level Influence on Teaching Autonomy

The next sphere of influence on a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy is created by state responses to the federal policies outlined in NCLB and the states' own

accountability system for reporting student performance on standardized testing. In Texas, where this research study was conducted, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is currently the performance measure used for accountability to state and federal policy. However, Texas has been requiring public school students to take various standardized tests since the 1980's and has over twenty years of disaggregated data to show that an achievement gap exists between white students and students of color, poverty, language difference, and disability on state tests (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; McNeil, 2000; Valenzuela, 2004, 2003, 1998). This sphere has the potential to influence a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy by requiring focused efforts to raise test scores to close the achievement gap. Additionally, states must show that all their schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all student groups. States must also show that 95% of all students in every group are participating in the testing. The accountability climate created by high-stakes testing has the potential to influence a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy.

## District Level Influence on Teaching Autonomy

District compliance to state and federal requirements is the next sphere of influence on a teacher's daily work with students. A typical response by districts to the new state and federal requirements is to implement a standard-based curricular reform that aligns what is taught (the curriculum) to what is assessed on the state test. This type of alignment of content to standards that can be tested was implemented in the district where this study takes place. Mandated curricular reforms at the district level can influence a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy by limiting her ability to make instructional decisions, controlling the pacing and delivery of instruction, and by

specifying content, materials, and use of scripted programs. Implementation of mandated reforms to improve student achievement requires tighter coupling between district staff and school staff; it implies monitoring for compliance and implementation as well as documented attendance at mandatory training for some teachers, depending on school assignment. These features of reform in this sphere can influence a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy.

## Campus Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy

In this model, the sphere of influence closest to the teacher is the campus setting where the teacher works and ultimately the teacher's own classroom. Influences on teaching autonomy in this sphere can come from governance issues related to how decisions are made on the campus, leadership style of the principal and other teacher leaders, the school accountability rating, and campus demographics. For instance, if the teacher works at a Title I campus that serves primarily students of color, poverty, language difference, and that has also been rated "low performing" on the state's measure of accountability, this combination of external pressures could have significant influence on the teacher's perception of teaching autonomy. Conversely, a teacher who works at a campus in an affluent community, at a school rated "high-performing" may have different perceptions of teaching autonomy, yet still be influenced by accountability to testing. This research study will seek to explain how teachers perceive their teaching autonomy at two economically diverse elementary school campuses and how they explain the influences on their teaching autonomy in the political climate of NCLB legislation.

In chapter two, the literature review is organized to address the spheres of influence on teaching autonomy. First, a description of the federal policy contained in NCLB tied to a school's AYP will illuminate how state and district policies related to accountability and high-stakes testing once enacted at the local campus level may narrow teaching autonomy. Reforms have been implemented at schools in the years following NCLB legislation that control curriculum and require increased supervision, monitoring, and surveillance systems to enforce compliance and implementation (Bushnell, 2003; Foucault, 1977). In the next section of the literature review, a critical discussion of curriculum content and the political nature of who decides what is taught in classrooms will include a discussion of social reproduction theory and capitalist goals for public schooling (Apple, 2001; Finn, 1999; McLaren, 2001; Stout, Tallerico & Scribner, 1994). Finally, a counter-hegemonic movement, which can be found in the literature on critical pedagogy and culturally-responsive teaching, will justify an argument for decentralization of school governance as one way to increase teaching autonomy, especially at low performing schools (Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll et al., 1992; Tucker et al., 2005).

*Problem Statement*

Because NCLB policy and sanctions are essentially tied to student scores on state mandated tests of accountability, these policies have the power to control curriculum, driving standards-based reform movements requiring an emphasis on teaching to the test that influences a teacher's general and curricular autonomy. Another problem occurs when districts adopt reform agendas to close the achievement gap that may unknowingly contribute to the goals of social reproduction theory, whereby students of poverty, color

and language difference are labeled "at-risk" and targeted for reforms that utilize a narrow, highly defined and often scripted curriculum aligned to the knowledge assessed on the state test (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valenzuela, 2001, 2005). By targeting this group for reforms and declaring poor student performance the cause of the achievement gap in test scores, "the onus of improvement is placed on the individual and the family" (Valencia et al., 2001). Teachers in this climate "have been the objects of increasing direct government intervention and management and conservative criticism" (Luke, 2004, p.1). Labeling student and teacher performance as the reason for the achievement gap can undermine a teacher's sense of efficacy, "the belief that teachers have about their skills and abilities to create desirable outcomes for students" (Tucker et al., 2005, p. 29). Researchers have shown that teacher efficacy (a dimension of autonomy) is one of few teacher characteristics related to student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teachers with a sense of personal efficacy believe that students can achieve in spite of obstacles they may face outside the classroom, such as poverty and peer influences. Teachers at schools designated low performing on state tests of accountability become the targets for reform efforts where top-down acts of governance dictate what knowledge is important and policies mandate compliance to the state's goals (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Laitsch, Hellman & Shaker, 2002). In this environment, the teacher is deskilled, becoming a mere technician of behavior detached from pedagogical decisions that are made instead by outside sources of control: central office curriculum specialists, policy makers, state standards, textbook adoptions, and scripted curriculum documents that detail the day-to-day learning in the classroom (Apple, 2001; Foucault, 1977; McLaren, 2001). Education reforms that target student performance on high-stakes

tests and teacher compliance to the goals of accountability often include curricular reforms like the one implemented in the district where this study was conducted. The problem in the study is, therefore, multifaceted because it concerns the teachers' accountability to state standards and testing, unintended political outcomes of standards-based reform, and school governance issues that all potentially contribute to and influence teachers' perceptions of their teaching autonomy in the current political environment that holds teachers accountable when they "have almost no authority over design and administration of the schools in which they exercise their 'educational authority': as subject matter specialists" (Heid & Leak, 1991; Nyberg & Farber, 1986; Williams, 1990 cited in Pearson & Hall, 1993, p. 172).

*Research Questions*

Given the problems created by the policy context and reform environment described in the district, I wanted to know how teachers think about their teaching autonomy and whether there are differences in perceptions between teachers at schools that serve high percentages of students of color, poverty and language difference and teachers at schools with low percentages of poverty and ethnic diversity. In Texas, schools are categorized and labeled by their students' performance on the test. No matter what a school is rated, all are subject to compliance with the same federal, state, and district policy mandates, yet it seemed teachers at schools in high poverty environments seemed to be functioning with less authority and control over their classrooms. I began to formulate this hypothesis about teaching autonomy within the district based on informal observations and by listening to teachers and administrators at various campuses talk about the implementation of a curricular reform, which instituted the use of grade-level

instructional planning guides (IPG's). I noticed that teachers at high poverty schools were subject to far more scrutiny and described situations that indicated they had less general and curricular autonomy than teachers who worked at low poverty schools. Building administrators, campus level and central office curriculum specialists monitored teachers at high poverty schools and expected them to follow the curriculum documents explicitly. In some instances, state education agency monitors visited classrooms and schools and I heard anecdotal reports from the teachers who called the monitors "IPG police" or "the suits", an Orwellian reference to those who are watching to make sure the guides are open to the right page, and whether the teachers are in compliance with district, state and federal mandates. I have taught in the district for ten years where this study is situated, five of those years at a neighborhood school in a high poverty environment rated as a low performing school and five years at school in a middle class neighborhood rated as an acceptable school. In addition to classroom experience, I have been an assistant principal for five years at a middle school located in an upper middle class suburban neighborhood with a current accountability rating of recognized. Because of these varied experiences, I know teachers and administrators all over the district and we often talk about our daily lives in schools. At the high performing school where I currently work, the teachers understand the curriculum documents as merely a guide, a suggestion of what to teach. No one comes into their classrooms to see if they are on the right page of the guide. This does not mean that these teachers do not use the mandated documents, only that no one seems to be checking whether they are or not. The principal at my campus has a high level of trust for her teachers and gives them a great deal of both general and curricular autonomy. Wondering about the implications of my observations

and whether my hypothesis was correct led me to the topic of this dissertation and the following research questions:

1. What similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy can be described, and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty Title I or low poverty non Title I)?
2. What factors are described by teachers as having an impact on their teaching autonomy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom and how do they connect this to student achievement?
3. In what ways do teachers describe actions of resistance or conformity to mandates that influence their teaching autonomy?

*Significance of the Study*

There is a vast research base on teaching autonomy but much of it predates the implementation of NCLB policy, which was signed into law January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush. Therefore, the relationship between autonomy and accountability in the current policy climate has not been fully explored (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This study contributes to our understanding of how reforms driven by state and federal accountability guidelines affect teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy and consequently control the curriculum and student achievement with implications for students of color, poverty and language difference who attend schools that do not make adequate yearly progress or are labeled low performing. Further understanding of how teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy at high performing schools and their decisions about curriculum and its impact on student achievement will offer comparison with implications for practice and future research.

*Organization of the Study*

One aim of this research project is to address the tension created by competing ideas about the best way to impact student achievement, how student achievement is measured, and how much control and autonomy teachers should have in making those decisions. This study utilized the Teaching Autonomy Scale developed by Pearson & Hall (1993) to rate teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy at two economically diverse elementary campuses in a large urban district. Results of the TAS were analyzed using descriptive statistics and to sort teachers into groups of perceived high and low teaching autonomy for selection in the interview study. This mixed method study had two parts: a quantitative sampling of teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy and follow-up, in-depth, intensive interviews with selected teachers. Teachers were asked open-ended interview questions that allowed them to think about how their teaching autonomy relates to student achievement and how they perceive their teaching autonomy in a mandated reform environment.

*Method*

Chapter Three will describe in more detail the mixed method design, which used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the quantitative part of the study, fifty participants rated the 18-item Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) and teachers who scored highest and lowest on the measure were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. All data were analyzed and interpreted using classical grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) (See Appendix D, p. 210 for Interview Protocol). This type of analysis generated an original grounded theory, which adds to the theoretical knowledge about the nature and forms of

teaching autonomy and better explains how the phenomenon of teaching autonomy is enacted and operates on school campuses. The use of a phenomenological approach to the interviews provided balance between the positivist ontological stance that a teacher's general and curricular autonomy can be measured by a score that reflects the reality of her lived experience. Though the Teaching Autonomy Scale was selected for use in this study precisely because of its high content validity of the construct of teaching autonomy and because it defines autonomy in two dimensions, curricular and general, interview data added depth to the description of the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced a certain phenomenon (Lichtman, 2006). In this study, the phenomenon described is the teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy at two economically diverse sites.

In the quantitative study, a two-sample t-test was used to analyze the data from the TAS for significance of relationship between teachers' scores for teaching autonomy and the type of school where they work, high poverty Title I, or low poverty non Title I. School demographic data for the sites are reported in Chapter Three. These results, combined with the interview data, were interpreted for comparison of the two groups of teachers and for implications to theories of teaching autonomy as it relates to teaching practice and student achievement in this accountability climate. Findings from the analysis of the TAS data by campus are reported in Chapter Four. Next, an original grounded theory of teaching autonomy is presented, which reports a role identity explanation of the phenomenon. The findings of the two studies were synthesized and analyzed as a whole, using classical Glaserian grounded theory method to arrive at the

theory of teaching autonomy presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, the implications for practice and recommendations for future research are presented.

*Assumptions & Limitations*

The basic assumption underlying this study was that teaching autonomy is essential to the professional lives of teachers. If teachers cannot be trusted to make the right decisions regarding important classroom decisions that directly affect student achievement, then teachers become nothing more than agents of the state and may unintentionally perpetuate the status quo and the achievement gap (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 1982; McLaren, 2003). This idea relates to a second assumption for this research, in that I view teaching as a political act that cannot be divorced from the sociopolitical environment or economic conditions of the nation-state where the teaching occurs (Apple, 2001; Bourdieu, 1990 cited in Luke, 2004; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2003).

Limitations to the study's internal validity arose from the selection of subjects for the research. At the time of the study, there were 5,610 teachers employed in the district where the study took place. Sampling "recommendations for generalizability are one percent of the total", or 56 teachers (Retrieved on April 12, 2006 from http://web.utk.edu/~wrobinso/540_lec_sample.html). However, gaining access to a random sample of teachers would not cluster teachers into cohort groups for comparison by school demographic characteristics. Therefore, the sample for the quantitative study was limited to teachers at two elementary campuses selected on the basis of the poverty level of the school and the campus principals' willingness to have their teachers participate in a research study on teaching autonomy. Teachers could have felt pressure to participate and may have answered the Teaching Autonomy Scale because they felt

obligated to please the principal. To mitigate this, I gave the questionnaire at the end of a faculty meeting without the principal present, so that teachers had the opportunity to leave if they did not wish to volunteer to take the 18-item questionnaire. Further, since I am specifically interested in differences between teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy as they relate to school assignment, I designed the study to pull participants from two distinct sites: a Title I and a non-Title I school. Schools receive Title I funding based on the percentage of students who qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. For this study, the high poverty school had over 80% of students who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. The low poverty school had less than 30% of students who qualify for this program. This type of stratified sampling divided teachers into two somewhat homogeneous groups, those at a high poverty school and those at a low poverty school. In this case, I utilized a selection process to test a hypothesis about the differences in perceptions of teaching autonomy between the two groups of teachers in order to see if the difference was significant. By utilizing this sampling technique for the quantitative study, I was able to use a disproportionate stratified sampling technique to obtain an equal number of participants from each stratum to participate in the qualitative study. A mixed method research design allowed for collection of in-depth qualitative data from the follow-up interviews, which provided further explanation of the differences between teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy by school site. The number of teachers available who met the scoring criteria for selection determined the number of teachers who participated in the follow up interviews. These criteria were teachers at both campuses who perceived the highest and

lowest teaching autonomy on the TAS. The results of this study describe how teachers perceive their teaching autonomy at the two economically diverse sites.

*Scope and Delimitations*

This study reports data on perceptions of teaching autonomy from teachers who work at two economically diverse elementary school campuses in a large urban district in central Texas. Campuses were selected based on the principals' willingness to have teachers participate in the study and to allow the researcher to administer the TAS to the teaching staff at a weekly faculty meeting. Two elementary schools that met the criteria of Title I status and non-Title I status were selected. The teaching staffs at the schools were a potential sample of approximately 112 teachers; however, some teachers chose not to participate in the study. From the original group of 50 that took the TAS, a purposefully selected, disproportionate stratified sample of teachers was selected to participate in the follow up interviews. These ten teachers committed to two meetings with the researcher. One meeting was conducted for the purpose of obtaining the interview data and a later meeting was used to establish the trustworthiness of the quotes used to support the grounded theory developed from the analysis. The study was conducted within the school year beginning in August of 2006 and ending in May of 2007 to maintain continuity of staff participating in the study. By limiting the study to one school year, I provide a theory of teaching autonomy that explains how teachers perceive their ability in the current climate of high accountability to make important decisions regarding their classrooms and their students.

School data used for comparison of the teacher's school assignment to her perceptions of teaching autonomy were drawn from the Texas Education Agency's

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for the school year beginning in August of 2005 and ending in May of 2006, as it is the most recent data available. Therefore, accountability data for the two campuses participating in the study was based on the previous year's performance.

# Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

*Organization of the Literature Review*

This literature review is organized into four sections to report the research relevant to explaining each sphere of influence and the nature of forces that are exerted on teaching autonomy from these external contexts. The first section describes the *Macropolitical Influences on Teaching Autonomy* where federal policy contained in NCLB specifies how schools and teachers will be held accountable for student achievement. This section includes research on teaching autonomy as it pertains to implementing federal policy. Research on the unintended outcomes of these policies which some have argued lead to a narrow, tightly controlled curriculum that promotes social reproduction theory are discussed in this section. The second section describes *State Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy* and includes research on school accountability rating systems and standardized testing. Implementation of mandated standards-based reform movements instituted at the state level are discussed for implications to teaching practice that ultimately control decision-making at the district level. These implications are discussed in the third section, *District Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy* and include a body of research on school governance, democracy and decision-making as it relates to teaching autonomy, which provides additional background. Finally, *Campus Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy* presents research that provides information on the construct of autonomy that directly relates to schools as hierarchical organizations. Research pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy and critical theory regarding teaching as a political and potentially emancipatory act for those

who are oppressed by the current system of public education will offer alternatives to current policies. By using the spheres of influences model to organize the review of the literature on teaching autonomy, I provide a comprehensive discussion of the theoretical framework in which the proposed study on teaching autonomy can be placed. This study adds to our understanding of the ways teachers cope with policy mandates, how they resist or conform to these policies and why, and in what ways outside factors influence their perceptions of teaching autonomy and ultimately control learning in the classroom.

*Rationale for the Model: Spheres of Influence on Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Autonomy*

Teaching autonomy as a construct cannot be viewed separately from the political, social and economic context of the society at large given that teachers are at the very heart of public education reform. In a liberal democratic society, educational institutions are subject to public accountability "under conditions of reasonable pluralism" (Blacker, 2000, p. 229), a phrase Blacker borrows from philosopher, John Rawls. From this contextualist viewpoint, the liberal democratic society Rawls envisions is a society "in which there is a diversity of comprehensive doctrines, all perfectly reasonable" (Rawls, 1999, p. 31). Blacker (2000) uses Rawls's theory in "The Institutional Autonomy of Education" to argue that within this pluralistic society, diverse social spheres of influence act on educational institutions in a push and pull fashion, all exerting perfectly reasonable demands for accountability. Ideally, because these demands are all reasonable, the pushing and pulling forces should equalize each other and cancel out any one sphere having too much influence on another. Theoretically, it is in this way that teachers in classrooms are thought to maintain a certain degree of autonomy, as they ultimately

control the classroom environment and can shut their door to the external forces. In the current policy environment, I have conceptualized teaching autonomy as nested inside these competing spheres of influence, Macropolitical, State, District and Campus, that put pressure on teachers to conform to policies imposed by external forces as illustrated in Figure 1 (See Chapter One, p. 5). However, I assert the forces exerted on teachers, particularly for teachers who work in schools primarily serving students of color, poverty and language difference, are out of balance in the current climate of accountability. In this climate, the teachers' classroom doors are not only propped wide open but "Big Brother" is also watching to borrow a phrase from George Orwell's prescient novel, *1984*.

*Macropolitical Influences on Teaching Autonomy*

No Child Left Behind Policy

The twenty-first century is often referred to in the literature as the era of accountability. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush represents for many educators the defining moment of the pendulum shift toward greater external regulation and control of the goals of public schooling. NCLB policy is actually situated in a long line of conservative education policies related to accountability begun in the years of Ronald Reagan's presidency. In both the 1980 and the 1984 elections, Reagan "appealed to the religious right and conservatives by supporting school choice, school prayer, and a restoration of moral values in the public schools" (Spring, 1997, p. 430). The Reagan administration also produced the report that labeled the entire nation "at–risk" in an "Open Letter to the American People", with publication of *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational*

*reform* (1983). Thus, the 1980's mark the beginning of high stakes accountability systems for public schools in response to the charges set forth for our educational system in the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. With the new accountability systems came annual student performance data disaggregated by ethnicity and economic status. Texas alone has over twenty-five years of such student performance data, which shows we have consistently failed to educate students of color, poverty and language difference. What the state accountability systems did for the nation is to solidify what we already knew: there is an achievement gap between the performance of white students and students of color, poverty and language difference on standardized tests of achievement (Amerin & Berliner, 2003; Berliner & Nichols, 2005; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valenzuela, 2004).

## Adequate Yearly Progress

Today, federal guidelines contained in NCLB policy outline the punitive measures to take with schools that do not make AYP, as measured by student performance in grades three through eight on state math and reading tests. Schools that fail to make AYP are subject to various levels of intervention and sanction, from school restructuring including reconstitution of staff to school closure and loss of federal funding. Student performance data on state reading and mathematics standardized tests are the measure used to determine AYP and data are broken down into student groups by ethnicity, income, language, and participation in special education. Schools face pressure to have a 95% participation rate of all student groups taking the state test, while also having all groups of students reach 100% proficiency on the tests by the 2013-2014 school year. In most cases, schools targeted for corrective action under NCLB guidelines

are burdened with trying to operate in an apartheid public education system where students of poverty, color and language difference receive an unequal education to begin with, and where teachers are the least experienced and under qualified (Kozol, 1993, 2005). Schools identified as low performing and in need of improvement by this measure are typically sites that illustrate a grave disparity in resources available to students and teachers; many are situated in neighborhoods of high poverty and urban decline, or rural isolation (Kozol, 1993, 2005). A separate and unequal system of public schooling has been restored across America where students and teachers in the resegregated public school system collide headfirst into twenty-first century state and federal policies that punish public schools for providing an inadequate education.

Attentive to this problem, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University was founded in 1996 by Gary Orfield and Christopher Edley Jr. to promote research in civil rights issues, specifically focused on education reform. Sunderlan & Kim (2004) working in conjunction with The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, conducted a qualitative and quantitative study of the first year (2002-2003) of implementation of the now landmark public education policy contained in NCLB legislation. The researchers analyzed six states, Arizona, California, Illinois, New York, Virginia, and Georgia and conducted interviews with various education professionals to determine the impact of implementation of the policies contained in the act. In addition, an analysis of the federal and state relationships indicated many factors were lacking, which hindered the effective implementation of policy.

> The reports show educators at all levels struggling to implement a dramatic and extremely complex change in federal education policy,

> which radically alters the role of federal and state governments while imposing unprecedented responsibilities and accountability for test score gains. The reports demonstrate that federal accountability rules have derailed state reforms and assessment strategies, that the requirements have no common meaning across state lines, and that the sanctions fall especially hard on minority and integrated schools, asking for much less progress from affluent suburban schools. The market- and choice-oriented policies, which were imposed on schools "in need of improvement," have consumed resources and local administrative time but have small impacts and are not being seriously evaluated (Orfield introduction in Sunderlan & Kim, 2004 p. 1)

The report identifies several issues that impact teaching autonomy: increased accountability at the classroom level to standardized test scores which reduce time for learning that cannot be measured on a standardized test, economic sanctions for low performing schools that serve students of color, poverty and language difference thereby reducing resources at schools already burdened by trying to operate in an apartheid system of public education (Kozol, 1993, 2005; Orfield et al., 1997; Williams & DeLacey, 1996); and the introduction of market and choice incentives for students at low performing schools that imply teachers are not doing their jobs (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004).

Current research by Wright and Choi (2006) show similar findings in a study conducted in Arizona using surveys and interviews to obtain views from third grade teachers of the impact of NCLB accountability policy and a state language policy that

restricts bilingual education and requires sheltered English immersion. Their data reveal teachers are confused about what is required and divided on what constitutes quality instruction for English language learners. Teachers further reported they were not given training in how to teach sheltered English immersion and students were receiving what the researchers called "a sink or swim education" (Wright & Choi, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, teachers provided evidence that high-stakes testing has narrowed the curriculum for these students by requiring that they focus time on teaching the subjects tested on the Arizona state assessment and neglect other content. Despite these concentrated efforts to increase test scores, this research shows that scores in reading and math for English language learners across the state have actually declined over the last three years (Wright & Choi, 2006, p. 2).

## Unintended Outcomes of School Reform - Social Reproduction Theory

Perhaps the consistent failure of students to achieve success on high-stakes tests at schools targeted for intervention under NCLB policies can be attributed to something other than the poor performance of students and their teachers. It is not new that disagreements between stakeholders arise over the purpose of schooling and the goals of public education. Some would argue the purpose of schooling is to train individuals to become productive members of society, with the goal of educating people to a level that they are able to participate in democratic life (Tozer et al., 2002). Others would argue the purpose of schooling is to give everyone the same standardized education with the goal of equal opportunity for all beyond public school (Retrieved November 27, 2006 from Texas Business and Education Consortium http://www.tbec.org/strategicplan). Still others argue that the purpose of schooling is to train individuals to take their place in the

workforce with the goal of furthering capitalist ideals for participation in a stratified global economy. This last view has received considerable critique from critical theorists who believe schooling in America, in its resegregated form, contributes to social reproduction theory, an idea that our children are schooled in a manner that will prepare them to take their place in the stratified class system set up by our capitalist economy (Apple, 1978; Gatto, 2001; Giroux, 1982; McLaren, 2003).

From a critical theory perspective, to be schooled in America means not to participate in a democratic educational endeavor at all, but instead, to be subjected to a compulsory education where control becomes the central issue (Finn, 1999). According to Finn's synthesis of the work of Anyon, Bernstein, Heath, Freire and others in *Literacy with an attitude: Educating working-class children in their own self-interest*, schooling experiences for children in America tend to fall into two broad categories: empowering or domesticating. Finn's review of their research shows schooling experiences are vastly different for children in public schools that serve predominantly poor and working class families (domesticating) versus children who attend public schools in neighborhoods serving the gentry class (empowering). This distinction is important to the discussion of the unintended outcomes of NCLB policy that targets campuses for reforms, since the campuses receiving the most intense interventions and sanctions are those which are arguably the ones where decades of domesticating education combined with social and economic inequality is what is really at the heart of poor performance. Other social justice issues impacting the educational experiences of students and subsequently a teacher's autonomy in the schools targeted for reform include the cycle of generational poverty of students and families attending, the high numbers of uninsured students

receiving little to no health care, institutional racism and ethnocentrism, and inadequate, sometimes dangerous facilities. Yet, these issues do not seem to be considered as factors that will negatively influence a student's performance and impact a teacher's autonomy. Critical theorists argue the real outcome of policies that try to reform the current educational system without addressing the economic and social justice issues presented here is to fulfill social reproduction theory, an outcome so covert in nature, that we do not know where to direct our anger, or how to attack the problem when educational reforms repeatedly fail (Apple, 1982; Bordieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Finn, 1999; Giroux, 1982).

*State Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy*

Standardized Testing and Autonomy

Many teachers voice dislike for "teaching to the test", a structural feature of the reforms implemented at the state level that have come about in response to NCLB policy. The orientation of federal and state policy places performance on state assessments and other standardized test scores above development of the whole child or other forms of "authentic assessment". In *Powerful learning and powerful teaching*, Hopkins (2001) discusses the danger of narrowing our ideas of effective student learning and authentic school improvement. "Teaching to the test…leads to a reductionist and impoverished interpretation of what constitutes learning" (Hopkins, 2001, p. 71). Teachers who support a constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 1966 cited in Hopkins, 2001) and who resist a swing to the traditionalist view of "drill and kill" popularized by Frederick Taylor at the beginning of the 20th century (Kleibard, 1995) have a difficult time finding a place for their pedagogical philosophies in the current political climate. Teaching autonomy is

intimately related to issues of control and power over who decides the best way to involve students in the construction of their knowledge.

> The most effective curricular and teaching patterns induce students to construct knowledge – to enquire into subject areas intensively. The result is to increase student capacity to learn and to work more effectively (Hopkins, 2001, p.75).

The conflict between teachers' philosophies regarding pedagogy and knowledge construction and the federal, state and district orientations focused on standards and test scores can undermine a teacher's professional judgment regarding curricular decisions. Educators find themselves mired in a bureaucratic system where differences in values over what constitutes learning, disagreements over who should decide what is taught and about the very nature of the teaching and learning process have already been decided for them (Stout et al., 1994).

Another outcome for students of color, poverty and language difference who fail to achieve on a test that has historically favored the dominant culture is the subjection to standards-based school reform, which narrows learning opportunities. By targeting this group and declaring poor student achievement the cause of the disparity in test scores, "the onus of improvement is placed on the individual and the family" (Valencia et al., 2001). Teachers in this climate "have been the objects of increasing direct government intervention and management and conservative criticism" (Luke, 2004, p.1). This state level intervention can dictate teaching to content standards and can undermine a teacher's sense of efficacy, "the belief that teachers have about their skills and abilities to create desirable outcomes for students" (Tucker et al., 2005, p. 29). Researchers have shown

that teacher efficacy (a dimension of autonomy) is one of few teacher characteristics related to student achievement. Teachers with a sense of personal efficacy believe that students can achieve in spite of obstacles they may face outside the classroom, such as poverty and peer influences (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teachers at schools designated low performing on state tests of accountability become the targets for reform efforts where top-down acts of governance dictate what knowledge is important and policies mandate compliance to the state's goals (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In this environment the teacher is deskilled, becoming a mere technician of behavior detached from pedagogical decisions that are made instead by outside sources of control: central office curriculum specialists, policy makers, state standards, textbook adoptions and scripted curriculum documents that detail the day-to-day learning in the classroom (Apple, 2001; Cummins, 1994; Goodlad, 1984; Foucault, 1979; McNeil, 1986).

Arthur Pearl (quoted in Valencia et al., p. 319) disagrees that poor student achievement is a cause of the achievement gap in test scores, saying instead, the gap is a symptom of a system rife with "savage inequalities" of providing these students with an inferior education, in schools that are overcrowded, with teachers who are inexperienced (Kozol, 1992, 2005). Pearl goes on to say, "school failure (and success) can be fully understood only when analyzed in the broadest political, economic, and cultural contexts" (cited in Valencia et al., 2001). The idea that the achievement gap is caused by the students' poor performance invariably brings the discussion to that of the teacher's poor performance in getting her students to pass the state test.

One can read many accounts of research findings indicating that the gap in Texas, and nationally is narrowing. However, one must look critically at the data and understand the test used, the passing rates, the level of minimum competency required to pass the test, and how those year-to-year changes in performance measures and test formats make comparisons from one year to the next inaccurate. Therefore, a simple comparison between student performance data on the state test over the last four years since NCLB policy implementation is, unfortunately, an inadequate assessment of whether the achievement gap has actually closed.

Parker (2001) explains why a simple comparison of test data for analyzing the achievement gap should be considered from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective.

> This leads me to believe that once again, a "shell game" of policy deception might be practiced regarding assessment in that once people of color believe they have the master's tools to improve on the standardized tests, then the master comes out with either new tools or new rules to follow to evaluate students, which in turn puts minority students further behind (Parker, 2001, p. 315).

Parker refers to the fact that typically in state testing, each year the test is given brings changes to the format, to the percent needed to meet a minimum passing standard, and to policies that dictate levels of measurement to be used to determine AYP. CRT exposes the supremacy of white culture to control the dominant power structures in the U.S., which includes all aspects of our society, including the purposes of schooling and the goals of education specifically, in this case. Therefore, the curricular reforms tied to state standards are representations of a curriculum focused on a standard prepared by the

dominant culture- the "master's" document of control over one aspect in the "shell game" of who decides what is taught (Parker, 2001). Parker further argues that NCLB policies driving reforms like the use of the district's instructional planning guides will only be questioned once they are shown to have an effect on the education of white students.

Proponents of standardized testing are likely to espouse the rhetoric surrounding equity and accountability systems as a way to expose and document our failure with African American and Hispanic students (Collier, 2002; Scheurich et al., 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2001). This line of thinking contends that high-stakes testing and accountability to federal policy and state monitoring systems have forced school districts to rethink what can be done to help children of color, poverty and language difference learn at the levels of their white counterparts. Before test score data were disaggregated by student groups (white, African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and special education) and reported to the public, all stakeholders were blind to the achievement gap, or so the argument goes. Linda McNeil (2000) in a study of Texas schools and the Texas accountability system has a different point of view:

> This disaggregating of scores gives the appearance that the system is sensitive to diversity and committed to improving minority children's education. This reporting, however, actually exacerbates growing inequities, because the push to raise the minority scores leads to a focus on the test to the exclusion of many other forms of education. (McNeil, 2000, p. 233, quoted in Anderson, 2001 p. 322).

From McNeil's perspective, when the test score data is disaggregated, the blame for poor student performance is placed squarely on the student's race, ethnicity, and economic

standing and teachers who serve these students are forced to concentrate teaching efforts to getting students to pass the state test. Anderson (2001) purports we are engaging in a "new discrimination" whereby students of color and poverty are provided with a "test-oriented education." Controlling curriculum in this manner reduces a teacher's curricular teaching autonomy. The curriculum documents become a political tool used as a "sophisticated technology of control—a form of official surveillance that controls populations through normalization" (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998 cited in Anderson, 2001). Curricular control often comes in the form of lesson plans and content matrixes provided to teachers by their districts that dictate the daily activity in classrooms. In the policy context of accountability to NCLB requirements, a teacher's curricular teaching autonomy has become tied to curriculum documents aligned with state standards.

*District Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy*

Curricular Autonomy

Pearson & Hall (1993) identified two types of teaching autonomy while conducting research to confirm the construct validity of their Teaching Autonomy Scale: general and curricular. These authors identify the problem as one of holding teachers accountable in a climate where they "have almost no authority over design and administration of the schools in which they exercise their 'educational authority': as subject matter specialists" (Heid & Leak, 1991; Nyberg & Farber, 1986; Williams, 1990 cited in Pearson & Hall, 1993, p. 172). A teacher's lack of authority to control the learning environment and to choose curriculum appropriate to the students' needs deskills the teacher and reduces her sense of professionalism (Hart, 1990; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Part of the conflict stems from the nature of the profession, which is has been

described as part science and art (Gage, 1978 cited in Ornstein, 2003). Teaching as science assumes a set of skills, which can be learned and delivered following a prescribed set of lessons. The art of teaching, on the other hand, is concerned with the artistic judgments a teacher makes about the best way to structure the learning based on the needs of her students and the classroom context. Good teachers hone their craft, relying on a set of theoretical, sometimes scientific, principles to guide their work but using an equal part intuition and following hunches, which can be just as powerful as following a scientific method (Jackson, 1990). The standards movement has relied heavily on the science of teaching to forward its aims and lends itself to the prescriptive curriculum guides that can reduce teaching autonomy.

## Control of Curriculum Through the Standards Movement

External pressures from interest groups, federal policy, state mandates, and accountability requirements all act upon schools as organizations to make them more similar to one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

> The concept that best captures the process of homogenization is isomorphism…a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 66).

Because of pressures contained in NCLB policy to have all students meet the more rigorous state assessment requirements, schools across the country are facing coercive isomorphism—the pressure to conform to national accountability standards and regain a sense of legitimacy in the process of schooling our children. To illustrate how the process of coercive isomorphism affects schools and directly impacts what is taught and

valued as knowledge in schools, the response by the school district in this study to control and standardize the curriculum will be described.

To begin the process, the district curriculum officials began researching best practices for teaching and looked for instructional programs that have support in research literature. In addition, they gathered information from the University of Texas Dana Center on high-performing school districts, data from the "Just for the Kids" website, and research from the National Curriculum Management Audit Center on Effective Schools (Collier, 2002, p. 2). The district reformers then analyzed the existing curriculum framework documents and made recommendations for improvement based on the findings. Essentially, the entire curriculum for the district, from prekindergarten through grade twelve, was reorganized into new documents, called Instructional Planning Guides (IPG's) aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Next, all administrators and teachers in the district received training in the new standardized curriculum policy proposed by the district. The district proclaimed the new curriculum guides "fully aligned with the state standards", claiming the implementation of the IPG's "will better prepare students for the state's new standardized testing system that begins this year", a reference to the change from the TAAS test to the TAKS test in Texas during the 2002 school year (Retrieved Sunday, November 9, 2003 from www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/curriculum/mission.phtml). Additionally, the district hoped to provide "a uniform curriculum that mirrors state standards and ensures consistent, quality instruction in every grade, every subject and every school" (ibid). In essence, this argument reveals an urgency to align the local written curriculum to the state assessment, so that what is taught in classrooms is also what is tested on the Texas

Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). It was also stated that the superintendent of the school district would like to be able to walk into any classroom, on any given day and know exactly what he should expect to see the teachers and students doing. This tight control provided by the curriculum documents allows for increased monitoring of teachers in their day-to-day work with students.

The work of German social theorist, Jurgen Habermas (in Shapiro, translation, 1972) posits different forms of knowledge, which are legitimized by the power structures found in the dominant culture of a society. He would call the form of knowledge the district is legitimizing by promoting the use of the documents, *technical knowledge*, a form that is easily measured and quantified.

> Technological knowledge is based in the natural sciences, uses hypothetico-deductive or empirical analytical methods, and is evaluated by, among other things, intelligence quotients, reading scores, and SAT results, all of which are used by educators to sort, regulate and control students (McLaren, 2003, p.197).

Habermas contends that those in power, valuing one kind of knowledge over another, ultimately control knowledge itself. He identifies two other forms of knowledge: *practical knowledge,* as in the type gained from a student internship, and *emancipatory knowledge* gained through deliberative collective action, as in the learning one gains from participation in a service learning project. These forms of knowledge are harder to quantify and do not readily allow for measurement on a state test but are arguably just as valuable.

Prescriptive curriculum documents linked to state standards and knowledge that can be measured on state tests do not leave much time for teachers and students to engage in discussion of critical social issues and severely limit the educational opportunities of students at low performing schools (Gluckman, 2002). Gluckman reviewed several studies, many commissioned by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, which "document a negative impact of high-stakes testing on classroom instruction, student and teacher morale, and drop-out rates" (cited in McLaren, 2003, p. 44). Many teachers recognize that a standardized curriculum does not speak to the language and culture of all students in a large urban district. Since the curriculum is intended to ameliorate the effects of growing up without the cultural capital of white middle class students (a background needed to pass the culturally biased state assessment) it is implied that culturally relevant forms of pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Moll, 1992) are inferior in closing the achievement gap. Knowledge outside of this narrow view of what students should know is devalued by the district's Instructional Planning Guides. Dinan-Thompson (2003) explores the "notion of duality of curriculum" from a Critical Theory perspective noting "curriculum documents are co-constructed not just because of what is considered to be the best for the learner, but because curriculum is a social and political process" (p. 190). The political and social nature of the IPG's is apparent in the greater deal of scrutiny principals and teachers have undergone in surveillance measures utilized by the district to ensure their implementation in the low-performing schools.

## Rationale for Curriculum Alignment

However, the rationale for the district to align curriculum to state standards that are tested is provided by English & Steffy (2001) in *Deep curriculum alignment:*

*Creating a level playing field for all children on high-stakes tests of educational accountability.* In this work, the author's assert that children of poverty and color who lack "cultural capital" (Kincheloe, 1999) are disadvantaged in performance on state mandated assessments because of a lack of curriculum alignment to the tests. The lack of performance by these students is not due to Social Darwinism or cultural deficiency (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1998; Coleman, 1966) as some have argued. Instead, English and Steffy (2001) believe that "alignment demonstrates that all children can learn and be successful" (p. vii) and that the gap we see is due to the fact that "the tests in use are flawed tools. They value some cultural forms of knowledge and devalue others. The valuation process is skewed towards those in control of things" (English and Steffy, 2001, p. 17). The achievement gap between white students and students of color, poverty and language difference is well documented nationally, and the large urban district implementing this curricular reform is no different. It is apparent in the research that children from cultures that reflect the content knowledge of the test have a distinct advantage (Wang, 1998; Leinhardt et al., 1981). By removing the cultural capital advantage that whites have consistently shown on unaligned tests, it is predicted that all student groups in the district would perform well on the state assessment, once the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum were aligned. This provided the rationale for the district to reduce the curricular autonomy of teachers by tightly controlling the content, pacing and selection of materials.

## School Governance & Autonomy

A primary conflict between teachers and district reformers concerns how important decisions are made for each campus. The teacher's ability to make important

educational decisions is one feature of perceived autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teacher-led movements have focused on professionalism and the idea that teachers are the best qualified to make key decisions regarding pedagogy, content, pacing, assessment, and selection of materials. In the 1980's, Peter Drucker's ideas about the management of large organizations included use of decentralized governance structures and autonomous self-managing teams instead of micro-management by the traditional hierarchy. This idea was adopted in schools across the country during the height of the teacher professionalism movement that viewed autonomy as essential to organizational leadership (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002).

Autonomy defined in this way is typical of professions where experts are viewed as having the ability to make important decisions regarding their work (e.g. doctors and lawyers) (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Therefore, autonomy within the teacher professionalism movement is tied to issues of school governance, which deals directly with how important decisions are made on school campuses (Lessinger, 1970). Richard Ingersoll (1994) looked at the degree of organizational control over teachers and their work in secondary schools and identified two schools of thought prevalent in the research on decision-making and management in schools. First is the idea from researchers studying working conditions of teachers and organizational features of schools, which purport schools, are "characterized by a lack of coordination, control, consensus and accountability" (Ingersoll, 1994, p. 257). These researchers problemitized autonomy as a feature of "loosely coupled educational organizations" or "organized anarchies" (Meyer & Scott, 1983; Weick, 1976). In a loosely coupled school organization, autonomy can be defined as isolated teachers operating a classroom in an independent, noncollaborative

manner (Firestone, 1985; Willner, 1990) and "the conventional wisdom among both organizational and educational researchers has been that schools are highly decentralized organizations, and that teaching, although in many ways not a self-regulating profession, is characterized by a great deal of workplace autonomy and discretion" (Ingersoll, 1994, p. 258). This type of autonomy has been concluded by a number of research studies to be a major factor in the problems schools face today which are a direct result of the poor performance of teachers who are unaccountable for results (Bacharach, 1990; Goodlad, 1985; Kirst, 1989; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). However, this viewpoint is disputed in the more current research which identifies autonomy as necessary for a teacher's sense of professionalism (Blasé & Kirby, 2000; Hanson, 2003; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997) and is tied to feelings of greater job satisfaction, less stress, and more authority in the classroom to make decisions concerning important educational issues (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Grant & Murray, 1999; Kyriacou, 1989). Prior research has also shown perceptions of teaching autonomy are connected to a teacher's belief that she is best qualified and, therefore, should have the authority to make decisions about the instructional process used in her classroom (Elmore, 1987; Fay, 1990; Franklin, 1988; Lortie, 1975). This viewpoint aligns with a second view of schools as organizations that are not loosely coupled at all, but instead are highly bureaucratic and "the epitome of the modern centralized undemocratic bureaucracy" (Ingersoll, 1994, p. 258). Ingersoll (1994) identifies the contradiction provided by the two viewpoints as central to the debate over the best way to organize schools.

Decentralized decision-making or site-based management that utilizes shared governance and allows for decision-making between teachers, principals, students,

parents and community "appear to promote better communication, buy-in from stakeholder groups, and contribute to successful schools" (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1999 cited in Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004, p. 156). Historically, school governance has varied greatly from state to state and within states (Ingersoll, 1994). Some schools have opted for freedom from central office oversight and the "one-size fits all mandates for staffing ratios, curriculum, scheduling and more" by instituting autonomous small schools models (Cohen, 2006, p. 459). This decentralized governance structure allows teachers to exercise autonomy, take risks, and exercise leadership by "bypassing rules and procedures that are often designed to meet the needs of adults in the district office rather than the needs of students and their families" (Cohen, 2006, p. 459). Traditionally, the federal government has left such issues of school governance to the states and districts, however NCLB is an example of federal policy implementation that forces districts to remove principals and reconstitute the entire teaching staff of a school if students do not perform well on the state tests and the school does not make AYP. Therefore, the pressure to conform to these standards has motivated districts to return to tightly coupled relationships with campus staff that implies educators are the problem. By providing teachers a curriculum tied to state standards, the model can be efficiently monitored to ensure that teachers deliver content students need to pass the exam. In this relationship, the teacher is deprofessionalized and is acted on by outside professionals who recommend the right curriculum, best pacing, and optimal materials to help students succeed on the state standards. What is assessed on the state test of accountability is what is taught and becomes the knowledge that is valued.

By instituting a tightly coupled relationship between central office staff and the classroom teacher in the form of requiring a mandated curriculum, conflict in the debate over how school organizations should be organized will increase. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), educational organizations can seek to decrease conflict by decoupling and returning curriculum decisions to the professional classroom teacher. Previously it was believed, "The closed classroom doors and loose internal coupling of most schools prevent values conflicts from surfacing" (Stout et al., 1994, p.10). However, in the current policy environment conflicts that came to the surface over the implementation of the standardized curriculum centered on teachers' perceptions that they were being deskilled. The guides implied in symbolic form and language a simple blueprint for success, which, if followed, would allow all students to pass the state assessment. The paint-by-number feel to the instruction of students was decried as dismissive of teachers' knowledge in planning for and responding to student interests and needs that go well beyond passing a state test. This form of governance "ignores the agency of the individual and the right that each person has to self-determination and fulfillment"(Gutmann cited in Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004, p. 147). Tightly coupled systems reduce variance but may also "stifle professional judgments" (Blau & Scott, 1962) resulting in less professional autonomy. A tightening of the system's organizational components reduces the agency of teachers in chronically low performing schools. Teachers are divested of their formal authority to control the classroom and learning environment. Students of color, poverty and language difference in low performing schools have even less authority to direct their own learning and often fall victim to a popular pedagogy of poverty (Payne, 1994) that consists primarily of giving

direct instruction, giving directions for the assignment, and monitoring seatwork around a curriculum which prepares students to take the state test (Nieto, 1994).

## A Critical Theory Perspective

From a Critical Theory Perspective, teachers and students are overpowered by the rigidity imposed by standardized lesson plans which conflicts with the teachers' professional knowledge of how best to deliver instruction (Haberman, 1991). Fernandes (2003) makes this point clear in *Big change question: Does critical theory have any practical value for educational change*? Here we are reminded "to achieve liberation and freedom it is essential to understand the dialectical relationship between structure and human agency, since knowledge of structure can help people change social conditions" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 182). It can be inferred from this that teachers are in a relationship with central office curriculum developers in which teachers and their students are subjugated and dominated by the curricular decisions made by those in power. In this relationship "the curriculum and the teaching are seen as a means to control specific purposes, which are not discussed" (Fernandes, 2003, p.184). This undiscussed, hidden agenda enacted through NCLB policy decreases teaching autonomy and contributes to mechanisms of control over the goals of public schooling, which in the current climate, promotes a system of domesticating education based on a business efficiency model (Apple, 1982; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

> From the perspective of critical educational theorists, the curriculum represents much more than a program of study, a classroom text, or a course syllabus. Rather, it represents *the introduction to a particular form*

> *of life; it serves to prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing capitalist society* (McLaren, 2003, p. 212).

For teachers who promote critical pedagogy, classrooms are to be places where respect for plurality of ideas, languages, and cultural identities encourages active resistance to the status quo (Giroux, 1988). The district's IPG's, however, do not readily allow for teachers to use a critical pedagogy approach or to promote culturally relevant teaching as the content has been narrowed to include intensive study of standards tested on the state assessment and the strict pacing creates time constraints for material outside the document.

### Counter-Hegemonic Movements: Critical Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Teaching

Opposition to NCLB policy implementation continues to come from educators and researchers who argue that a standardized curriculum aligned with the state assessment is perpetuating cultural hegemony with the purpose of maintaining students of color, poverty and language difference in the social order (Anderson, 2001; Apple, 1979; McLaren, 2003; Parker, 2001; Spring, 1992; Valencia et al., 2001;Valenzuela, 2004). By using a test that is culturally biased toward those with cultural capital (white middle and upper class students), it is argued that students of color, poverty and language difference are forced to assimilate to the knowledge and power structure reflected in the test (Habermas, 1972). Knowledge related to the students' cultural backgrounds and languages is devalued, and what one needs to know in order to pass the test is based on the dominant culture's values (Delpit, 1996; Finn, 1999; Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lather, 1984; Miller, 1997; Moll, 1992). Teachers who support critical pedagogy

and culturally relevant practices find their philosophy runs counter to the accountability and standards-based reform movements promoted in the NCLB policy environment.

*Campus Level Influences on Teaching Autonomy*

The competing agendas between various constituencies influencing the day-to day lives of public education teachers ultimately returns to the conflict over issues of power, control and legitimacy of the system. Which knowledge is legitimate, and who should control the learning in public school classrooms -- teachers, students, central office managers, the business community, state and federal policy? These spheres of influence on the education system are supposed to work as "a multiplicity of mutually canceling forces" that if positioned properly work to create a kind of relative autonomy appropriate in a pluralistic society (Blacker, 2000); however, teachers experience a range of autonomy depending on the school setting. In the district where this study was conducted, all teachers have been given a mandated curricular reform document called the Instructional Planning Guide (IPG) at every grade level, prekindergarten through twelfth. The IPG's are correlated to the state standards tested on the state test and somewhat to items tested on benchmark tests given every six or nine weeks. End of course exams at secondary schools are even less correlated to the documents, though the curriculum and assessment departments at the central office level are working to better align all tests given in the district to the curriculum guides and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

This type of alignment and control creates a tension among teachers, which Johanna Hadden (2000) describes is created by dissonance between what teachers are taught in university preparation courses and the real world of the classroom. She

characterizes teachers' pre-service university experiences as imbuing them with a "charter to educate" and to become "agents of change" whereas their professional lives are enacted as "disciples of received values" charged with "reinforcing existing structures" (Hadden, 2000, p. 244). This dichotomy between a teacher's beliefs about their role as professionals with a "charter to educate" and the beliefs of principals and central office staff of a teacher's role, which Hadden characterizes as "a mandate to train: to compel adherence to implicit and explicit behavioral norms; to demonstrate loyalty to business-promoted, state-sustained, traditional curricula; and to support bureaucratically imposed rules and regulations that include standardized testing and tracking" forms the core of the autonomy debate.

## Mandating Reform: Issues of Implementation

Educators in the district where this study on teaching autonomy was conducted received the IPG's just a few days before students returned to their classrooms in the summer of 2002, coinciding with the first school year of implementation of NCLB policy. One professional development day was spent giving teachers instruction on how to use the new core curriculum. From the district's point of view, it exercised its power to develop a new curriculum policy that would direct teachers and principals in the day-to-day act of deciding what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught in a top-down act of governance (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004). By exercising this authority to control the curricula, the school administrators "validate them (the curricula) as legitimate innovations in educational theory and governmental requirements" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 348). Teachers and principals were literally inundated with heavy stacks of curricula that, if implemented, would restore legitimacy to the district by giving

all school children the same opportunity to learn, no matter what school they attended. Furthermore, the guides appeased a particular social action interest group by showing that the district was serious in coming up with a plan to address the achievement gap between the white and Asian students and the students of poverty, color and language difference on state tests of accountability. Certainly, the argument for alignment has some validity, however, the basic premise that what is taught in classrooms should be controlled by the content of the state standards tested on the state assessment is not without opposition (Giroux, 1982; McLaren, 2003; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2002; Valencia et al., 2001).

## Control through Monitoring

The difference in expectation of implementation of the standardized curriculum guides between low poverty and high poverty campuses in the same district was communicated subtly by telling staff at high performing schools (mostly low poverty campuses) that the documents were merely a guide. However, teachers at schools where test scores continue to reveal the achievement gap, (mostly campuses with high percentages of students of color, poverty and language difference) were told the documents should be followed explicitly, which introduced the necessity for a system of surveillance to monitor their use. Teachers in the low performing/high poverty schools referred to this surveillance as the "IPG Police", or "the suits", names for the outsiders who come into the classroom to check to see if the teacher has the curriculum document visible, open to the correct page, and teaching the lesson for the subject area as indicated for that day. This type of monitoring creates a climate of distrust and assumes a level of deficiency on the part of the professional who cannot get her students to perform well enough on standardized assessments provided by the state and therefore, must be

monitored for compliance to teaching to the test. The outside professionals who are assigned to support the targeted campuses in the reform efforts most often see teachers who work in these schools as "in need of intervention" due to the students' poor performance on the state assessment.

Foucault (1965,1977, 1979) who studied the prison system and the hospital system points out that knowledge is a result of what is defined by the system as legitimate. Knowledge becomes part of a truth regime, whereby those in power deem what stands for legitimate knowledge; in this case, what is legitimate knowledge for the classroom. To maintain the stratification of knowledge and to control this power, the institution is forced to utilize elements of control, like monitoring and surveillance systems. Foucault's research led him to the discovery of a prison design by Jeremy Bentham, an 18th century architect who is credited with the Panopticon, a tower-like structure pierced with windows for surveillance located in the middle of an outer ring of buildings which contain the cells of those one wishes to observe (Foucault, 1965, 1977, 1979). Foucault uses Bentham's design to discuss how the idea of being watched functions to control human behavior, creating a "power through transparency" that prevents people from wrong-doing, rendering them powerless to act on their own human agency (Foucault, 1977, p. 154). Foucault asserts that this method of surveillance involves very little expense.

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, and material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze that each individual under its weight will internalize to the point that he is his own overseer, each

> individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself (Foucault, 1977, p. 155).

The "gaze" referred to by Foucault (1977) in his writings on power and surveillance in the prison system is cast more intently upon the targeted schools and teachers. In Owellian fashion, "Big Brother" is watching, and with expectations for implementation rigidly enforced, students of color, poverty, and language difference receive the "benefit" of alignment of curriculum to the state mandated assessment and teachers who have been trained in the latest scripted teaching programs (Collier, 2002; Hadden, 2000; Kozol, 2005). Since this curricular reform is intended to close the achievement gap in performance on the state test by reducing the negative effects a lack of cultural capital has on one's ability to pass the "white" test, it is no surprise that the schools targeted for reform are watched more closely by the Panopticon in an effort to control the environment (Bushnell, 2003).

Policies under NCLB incorporate "the new policy technologies: the market, managerialism and performativity set over the older policy technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy" (Ball, 2003, p. 215). Ball explains, "policy technologies involve the calculated deployment of techniques and artifacts to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power" (2003, p. 216). Though he writes from a UK perspective, Ball's discussion of the interplay of these policy technologies in "*The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity*" is relevant to all teachers who face surveillance systems focused on performance. Ball contradicts Foucault's idea that transparency and self-monitoring come about through surveillance and constructs the argument that "performativity is the new mode of state regulation that

produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take even greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications." Regarding the maintenance of fabrications, many states have been accused of inflating test scores and lowering achievement standards in order to meet the requirements for AYP as defined in NCLB policy (Carr, 2006; Feller, 2006; Sturrock, 2006). Ball further argues that the pressure placed on teachers to have their students perform well on these high-stakes tests destroys their individual autonomy and essentially their soul. What Ball calls *a technology of performativity* has as its "central function to translate complex social processes and events into simple figures or categories of judgment" (p. 217), in this case, rendering the complex acts of teaching and learning into numerical data points used to categorize the success of students attending schools targeted for the reform efforts. Once student achievement is set as a productivity target, a data point on the state assessment, teachers and their performance become the means by which the students will reach that target. The teachers in the schools with the most work to do to reach the target become the focus of the reform effort and many "engender what Lyotard (1984) calls the terrors of performativity" (cited in Ball, 2003, p. 216). The supervisors of this reform effort, many who are teachers themselves, are what Foucault (1979, p. 294) calls "technicians of behavior, their task to produce bodies that are docile and capable". The instructional specialists who attempt to manage and control teacher and student behavior in the district's reform effort may be inadvertently creating an atmosphere of surveillance and superiority which results in teacher anxiety, dread and reduction in professional autonomy, and attrition due to decreased job satisfaction (Ball, 2003; Chadbourne & Ingvarson, 1998; Troman, 2000).

On the other hand, district reformers responding to NCLB policies may take the view that their support of teachers in this system builds professional learning communities where teachers speak a common language, collaborate to increase student achievement and learn the latest strategies for increasing student performance on the state assessment. Supovitz and Weathers (2004), working for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, frame the problem as one of school districts needing to know whether reform initiatives are successful and in need of some way of tracking implementation at the classroom level. They identify a trend in education to utilize monitoring systems from the business and non-profit strategic planning literature as especially seductive to the business management side of educational organizations (Caroll, 2000; Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Koteen, 1989). However, this type of monitoring is lacking in providing an appropriate framework for monitoring the systematic attainment of instructional goals at the classroom level. Supovitz and Weathers (2004) posit one reason for this lack of monitoring at the instructional level is that teachers have been culturally and historically defined as autonomous entities, citing Lortie's (1975) work, *Schoolteachers*, and Weick's (1976) article on *Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems* to support this assertion. From this view of teachers as autonomous decision makers, monitoring systems have focused on the outcomes of reform rather than on the implementation of reforms. In their study of a locally developed instructional monitoring system in use in a large urban district in Florida, the researchers describe the process of contextualizing the process of monitoring teachers based on the goals and priorities of the district. Using qualitative methods that included document reviews, interviews with the data collectors and the host principals, and

surveys of 126 principals in the county, the researchers found "the snapshot system" provides a picture of a particular aspect of implementation of district reforms at a single moment in time. A limitation to the study was that teachers were not involved as participants in the research; therefore, their view of the new monitoring systems' influence on their autonomy is absent from the findings. Further, the authors claim "the utility of any instructional implementation monitoring system is predicated on a system wide vision of instruction, which can be reasonably expected to exist in classrooms and schools across an educational system" (Supovitz & Weathers, 2004, p. 19). The view that a system wide vision of instruction exists across an educational system is a bold assertion, given that teachers' voices were left out of this research.

*Implications from the Literature for the Study*

The two schools that participated in the study are involved in the district's standards-based curriculum reform effort described here and represent a microcosm of public school systems and issues facing large urban districts as they comply with policies contained in the NCLB Act. Enmeshed in the daily business of schooling, this district now has four school years of state test data to assess whether implementing a standardized curriculum tied to state testing has reduced the achievement gap and teachers have four years of experience with the mandated curricular reforms and can offer insight into how policies enacted at the local level have influenced their teaching autonomy in this high accountability environment.

Gareth Morgan (1998) discusses the holographic model of the brain as a metaphor for the organization; one principle of this model is "Minimum Specs". The idea here is that "if a system is to have the freedom to self organize, it must possess a certain degree

of space or autonomy that allows appropriate innovation to occur" (p. 105). Morgan goes on to point out that this seems to be stating the obvious, however, what has happened in school systems is the tendency to *over define* and *over control* curriculum which negates the function of redundancy, variety, and innovative potential that teachers and students bring to the classroom arena. Hanson (2003) states, " the teaching – learning process, requires and justifies control by teachers who are subordinates in the educational hierarchy" (p. 71). He further asserts that teachers should have a right to refuse the managerial control imposed on their teaching because of the unique needs of classroom instruction and their need to control the learning process. Teachers in this district must implement reforms in the current system created by the education organizations' hierarchy and other political entities, which control the goals of education, and thereby the very value system surrounding what constitutes knowledge. Deskilling teachers, a by-product of implementing state controlled curriculum initiatives, such as the one described here, and federal policies contained in NCLB are external forces that influence teaching autonomy.

One aim of this research project is to address the tensions created by the various entities operating in the competing spheres of influence, specifically with regard to how student achievement is measured and how much control teachers perceive they have in making critical educational decisions in this type of high accountability environment. The study was designed with a mixed method approach to first quantify a measure of teachers' perceptions of autonomy at two schools with economically diverse demographics located in a large urban district in Texas. A qualitative component of the study allowed for follow up interviews with selected teachers who described the factors

which influence their teaching autonomy and ways they resist or conform to top-down mandates. The narratives provided by teachers who are currently implementing reforms contributed the data, which adds to our understanding of how reforms driven by state and federal accountability guidelines affect teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy and consequently student achievement. Furthermore, this study contributes to our understanding of the ways teachers cope with policy mandates, how they resist or conform to these policies and why, and in what ways outside factors influence their perceptions of teaching autonomy and ultimately control learning in the classroom. Implications for practice are offered which further our understanding of a teacher's sense of her teaching autonomy and how it may influence student achievement. Based on data collected in the study, an original grounded theory of teaching autonomy is reported that has implications for policy and practice, as well as for future research.

# Chapter Three: Method

*Background of the Study*

Prior research has shown perceptions of teaching autonomy are connected to a teacher's belief that she is best qualified and, therefore, should have the authority to make decisions about the instructional process used in her classroom (Elmore, 1987; Fay, 1990, Franklin, 1988; Lortie, 1975). Thought of in this way, teaching autonomy is explained from a theoretical framework of professionalism which assumes teachers operate with the freedom to choose and once licensed and credentialed, have free will to make important decisions in all aspects of their professional lives from classroom management to instructional focus, selection of materials and pacing of lessons. Autonomy is seen as a prerequisite for professionalism, since other professional occupations like doctor and lawyer require autonomy to make decisions and to have authority over the work environment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The current teacher professionalism movement is tied to decentralized governance structures made popular in the 1980's and 1990's for public schools, where "site-based management" became the buzzword for local campus decision-making.

Linked to the idea of professionalism is the professionalization movement, which for teachers, came into its own during the late 1950's, when fear of Russia stepping ahead of the U.S. in terms of education levels was created by the Sputnik launch in 1957. This fear fueled public policy and forced school reforms that were critical of teachers and curriculum. Teachers were decried in this period as incompetent, poorly trained, and even unpatriotic, attacks on the profession which Tyack and Cuban (1995) assert, "put progressive educators on the defensive and fueled the 'back to the basics' reform

movement" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.53) which is at the root of the standards-based reforms we see today resulting from NCLB policy. Currently, the professionalization movement seeks to unify standards for the education of pre-service teachers in four-year university programs, and alternative certification programs. State boards for educator certification control and oversee the licensing and credentialing through establishing certification requirements of public school teachers and maintaining records. NCLB legislation requires that teachers are highly qualified and certified in the subject area for which they are assigned. However, the profession of teaching and the construct of teaching autonomy are influenced by the public nature of the profession. Public school educators must respond to, and are influenced by external pressures that professionals working in the private sector, such as doctor and lawyer, may ignore. In the current policy environment, teaching autonomy can be viewed as nested inside competing spheres of influence that put pressure on teachers to conform to policies imposed by these outside forces, which include macro and micropolitical features as illustrated in Figure 1 (See Chapter 1, p. 5).

*Research Hypothesis*

In this study my hypothesis is based on the ways I believe these spheres of influence act to limit some teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy more than others. Specifically, I posit that schools serving high percentages of students of color, poverty and language difference become sites where teachers have little to no teaching autonomy due to the tightly coupled relationship between the classroom and external sources of control, while teachers at schools serving the gentry class have greater perceived autonomy and less pressure from external sources (Finn, 1999) Teachers at both sites are

subjected to curricular reforms that require them to deliver a tightly controlled, domesticating form of curriculum necessary for the state's aim to have all students pass an assessment of minimum competency standards, a process that serves to perpetuate the status quo and fulfills the goals of social reproduction theory (Anyon, 1980; Bernstein, 1975; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Farkas, 1990; Finn, 1999; Heath, 1983; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b; Guttman, 1987; Kozol, 1992, 2000; McLaren, 2003; McNeil, 2000; Valencia et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 1999, 2004). Mandated reforms resulting from sanctions imposed in this high accountability environment must be monitored for implementation, necessitating increased supervision of teachers for compliance and attendance at training beyond a district's typical staff development. By this same reasoning, teachers at campuses labeled high performing in this policy environment will not need to be monitored as closely because their students already perform well on the standardized tests used for accountability. Therefore, it logically follows that teachers at high performing campuses will perceive more teaching autonomy to choose curriculum and make instructional decisions. One result of this increased perception of teaching autonomy is students at high performing schools may receive an enriched, empowering curriculum that goes beyond knowledge needed to meet minimum competencies required to pass the state test. I believe the tightly coupled reform process illustrated by the spheres of influence on teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy may unintentionally serve the goals of social reproduction theory by educating all students, those at high poverty schools and those at low poverty schools, to take their respective places in the capitalist class structure of American society. Therefore, I predicted there would be a significant relationship between a school's demographic characteristics and a teacher's perception of

teaching autonomy because of the tightly coupled environment created when schools are engaged in mandated reforms. Additionally, high performing schools seem to have more latitude in issues of governance, which are directly related to perceptions of teaching autonomy, and I predict a more loosely coupled arrangement at these campuses. I must make these assertions clear at the beginning of my study to dispel any notion that I believe the outcome described in my hypothesis is accidental, though it is probably unintentional. Students of color and language difference tend to populate high poverty schools, while their white counterparts from middle and upper income families attend high performing schools, where I believe teachers have greater control and decision-making regarding pedagogy. This research study was designed to test this hypothesis.

*Problem Statement*

Research on teaching autonomy confirms that teachers who perceive themselves as empowered to make decisions have greater job satisfaction, less stress, and more authority in the classroom concerning important educational issues (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Kyriacou, 1989). Therefore, I conceptualized the problem as a struggle for control and power over who decides what knowledge is important in the public school classroom. Teachers and students, those constituents closest to the problem, have the least power and control to make decisions concerning what knowledge is important in the current policy context. Accountability to the state's predetermined knowledge provides the backdrop for teachers' and students' decision-making and subsequent learning in the twenty-first century classroom, therefore, having a direct influence on their autonomy. There is vast prior research to show that a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy is tied to job satisfaction, stress level, feelings of

empowerment, and sense of professionalism (Caprara et al., 2003; Coladarci, 1992; Evans, 1998; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Jex & Bliese, 1999) and that a teacher's perception of low autonomy, tied to having little authority over the classroom learning, is often a factor in deciding to leave the profession (Blasé & Matthews, 1994; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). However, most of the research cited here predates the implementation of NCLB policy. Little research has been done that explores the relationship between a teacher's perception of autonomy in the current climate of high accountability where student achievement and adequate yearly progress are measured by a single score on a state standardized test.

*Rationale for a Mixed Method Research Design*

This research examines how teachers at two economically diverse elementary school campuses perceive their teaching autonomy in the climate created by federal, state, and district policies driven by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. A mixed method was selected for this study because I wanted a quantifiable measure of teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy for comparison to the teachers' school assignment. Yet, I also wanted more than just a score, which represented the teachers' perception of teaching autonomy on a set of fixed indicators. I wanted to hear directly from teachers about how they experience teaching autonomy in their day-to-day lives in the schools. The use of a phenomenological approach to the interviews was an attempt to provide balance between the positivist ontological stance that a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy can be measured by a score that reflects the reality of their lived experiences. Though the Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993) was selected for use in this study precisely because of its high content validity of the construct of teaching

autonomy and because it defines teaching autonomy in two dimensions, curricular and general, interview data added depth to the description of the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced a certain phenomenon (Lichtman, 2006). In this study, teachers' who work at two economically and demographically diverse elementary schools during a period in the history of public education of high accountability to external sources of control describe the phenomenon of teaching autonomy.

The study was organized in two parts. To collect the quantitative data, fifty teachers at two public elementary schools in a large urban district in central Texas responded to an 18-item questionnaire called the TAS (Pearson and Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The scale provides a way to quantify a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy in two dimensions: curricular and general. The scores on the TAS were analyzed for similarities and differences between teachers by campus assignment. Demographic data for student population of the schools is reported to further describe the teachers' school settings. Demographic data and school accountability ratings are reported annually in this state and are easily obtained from the Texas Education Agency. Furthermore, NCLB policy requires schools to publicize and distribute an annual "school report card" which makes the data available to the public (http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml). However, just a comparison of teachers' perceived teaching autonomy scores on the TAS analyzed by their assignment to a Title I or a non-Title I campus would not yield information about the relationship between the two, other than significance. To gain a broader picture of the relationship between perceptions of teaching autonomy and a teacher's school assignment, I combined the quantitative analysis with a qualitative interview study and used classical grounded

theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1967) to analyze the data collected. These interviews required practitioners to discuss their day-to-day lives working in the high accountability setting created by NCLB policy.

Interview questions allowed teachers to discuss the ways they cope with policy mandates, how they resist or conform to these policies and why, and in what ways these outside factors influence their perceptions of teaching autonomy and ultimately control learning in the classroom. These background assumptions are what Blumer's (1969) research calls sensitizing concepts (in Charmaz, 2006). Sensitizing concepts are the underlying interests I have in this study: the policy climate and how it influences teachers at the classroom level, mandated reforms and how teachers respond to implementation, school demographic characteristics and how the teacher perceives her teaching autonomy in the school setting, and how the teacher defines and perceives her influence on student achievement in this environment. These sensitizing concepts can be explored within the structure provided by the *Spheres of Influences on Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Autonomy* model (See Chapter One, p. 5) and form the initial ideas behind this research and influenced the questions I asked interview participants. Though I have a hypothesis about how these elements of the external system work to influence a teacher's classroom practice, grounded theory method requires the researcher take a neutral stance without imposing personal beliefs about the way the system works to influence teaching autonomy. Rather, in the qualitative study, the voices of teachers involved in the day-to-day business of educating students in the policy environment described in the model, generated the data from which an original theory of teaching autonomy was developed. In Chapter Four, the results of the study are organized so that the two studies adhere to

Glaser and Straus's (1967) contention that "all is data". Teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy, based on TAS score, are compared for significance to characteristics of the school to which they are assigned. Data from the qualitative analysis expands the information gained from the comparison of teachers TAS scores and an original grounded theory of teaching autonomy is presented.

*Significance of the Study*

This study addresses an area of research that has not been fully explored by comparing teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy to school assignment and accountability to external controls (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Though much has been studied regarding teaching autonomy and its link to various other constructs, such as efficacy, professionalism, empowerment, motivation and decision making (Caprara et al., 2003; Coladarci, 1992; Evans, 1998; Guskey, 1988; Jex & Bliese, 1999; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997), few studies, if any, have addressed the relationship between teaching autonomy and a teacher's school assignment and subsequent accountability to district, state and federal reform initiatives resulting from the policy climate created by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This study proposes a theory of how teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy are influenced by the external pressures coming from both macro and micropolitical entities in this high accountability environment and how teaching autonomy is enacted in schools.

The construct of teaching autonomy is also linked to efficacy, defined as the belief teachers have about their skills and abilities to create desirable outcomes for students (Tucker et al., 2005). Researchers have shown that teacher efficacy (a dimension of autonomy) is one of few teacher characteristics related to student

achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teachers with a sense of personal efficacy believe that students can achieve in spite of obstacles they may face outside the classroom, such as poverty and peer influences. This study contributes to our understanding of how reforms driven by district, state and federal accountability guidelines influence teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy and consequently student achievement with implications for students of color, poverty and language difference who attend schools subjected to the mandated reforms. Furthermore, our understanding of what factors influence teachers' perceptions of autonomy offers implications for practice and can inform school leaders involved in implementing the NCLB reform agenda.

*Organization of the Study*

This study on perceptions of teaching autonomy utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study is organized in two parts because of the mixed-method design. First, a participant pool of teachers assigned to both a low poverty non-Title I campus and a high poverty Title I school were asked to fill out the 18-item questionnaire called the Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The primary purpose of using the TAS was to assign a score to the teacher's perception of teaching autonomy and to sort and select teachers for the qualitative study. A second purpose was to compare teachers' answers on the instrument by campus assignment and an item analysis of the TAS was conducted for this purpose. From the initial group of 50 teachers who took the TAS, a purposive sample of ten respondents was selected to participate in the second part of the study. Teachers at both campuses who scored highest and lowest on the measure were sorted for selection to the

interview cohort. Teachers selected for the interview study participated in a semi-structured interview, which was tape-recorded, and their responses were transcribed for coding and analysis using classical grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1967) that seeks to build theory from the data about the phenomenon of teaching autonomy. In the analysis, interview responses were compared between the teachers and to their individual score on the TAS and to their school assignment. Using Glaser's grounded theory method, the transcript data and the quantitative data were considered as a whole. Through Glaser's method of constant comparative analysis, both data sets provided information that was coded for themes. For comparison purposes teachers' scores on the TAS were grouped by school assignment using two categories:

- The low poverty school group included teachers who teach at Overton Elementary where the percentage of students who qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program is 30% or lower and, therefore, the school does not qualify to receive Title I funding
- The high poverty school group included teachers who teach at a Palomares Elementary where the percentage of students who qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program is 80% and above and, therefore, the school qualifies to receive Title I funding

Analysis of these two groups of teachers' scores on the TAS revealed how teachers at two different settings, a low poverty and a high poverty school, described their perceptions of teaching autonomy. Data collected in the quantitative and qualitative studies were examined for answers to the research questions.

*Research Questions*

Three research questions directed this inquiry into teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy in the current policy climate.

1. What similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy can be described, and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignments (high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I)?
2. What factors are described by teachers as having an impact on their teaching autonomy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom and how do they connect this to student achievement?
3. In what ways do teachers describe actions of resistance or conformity to mandates that influence their teaching autonomy?

Data gained from teachers who responded to the TAS was combined with state data contained in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) annual reports published for each school by the Texas Education Agency, which described the teachers' school sites. Item analysis of the TAS gave further information regarding the similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy as it related to the teachers' school assignments. The fifty respondents who participated in the quantitative study served as the source for the ten participants interviewed in the qualitative study. Follow-up interviews with the selected teachers who scored highest and lowest on the TAS by campus added depth to the information found in the quantitative data. Interview transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes and substantive categories emerged. By considering all the data in the study as a whole, an original grounded theory of teaching

autonomy was discovered through this analysis. The findings of the study and the answers to the research questions are reported in Chapter Four.

*Quantitative Measure*

Pearson and Hall (1993) developed and validated the TAS, an 18-item questionnaire that teachers answer by responding to a Likert scale (See Appendix C, p. 209, Teaching Autonomy Scale). The scale is organized with four responses to eliminate the neutral choice, so that possible responses are: definitely true, more or less true, more or less false, and definitely false. This instrument was chosen for its ease of use and high content validity of the construct of teaching autonomy. Pearson and Hall conducted two studies to develop the scale. First, a pilot study using a 35-item questionnaire was administered to 74 practicing teachers at all grade levels. From the pilot research, the authors revised the scale to include 20 items with an internal consistency coefficient of .91 using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the Cronbach alpha internal consistency. The refined scale was then given to 370 teachers at all grade levels teaching in the Paseo County School District in Florida during the 1988-1989 school year. From the data analysis in the follow up study, two items that were in direct conflict on the scale were deleted and the internal reliability with the final version yielded a coefficient of .80. Based on their factor analysis, the researchers found teaching autonomy is not a single trait but is composed of two dimensions: general teaching autonomy and curricular autonomy. General autonomy was identified as the factors related to "classroom standards of conduct and personal on-the-job discretion" while curricular autonomy factors were related to "issues concerning the selection of activities, materials, and instructional planning and sequencing" (Pearson & Hall, 1993, p. 177).

Recently, Pearson & Moomaw (2005) confirmed the two-factor dimension of the TAS and improved the internal consistency reliability of the scale (r = .83). The final 18-item version of the instrument was used in this study (See Appendix C, p. 209, Teaching Autonomy Scale).

Since the questionnaire is designed to reveal perceptions of teaching autonomy in two dimensions, general and curricular, the fit with this research study is appropriate for looking at these two dimensions of autonomy within the policy context created by NCLB accountability in this district. Many districts have responded to NCLB policy by mandating curricular reforms that align content to standards that are assessed on the state's test of accountability (English & Steffy, 2005). This type of curricular reform has also been widely criticized in the literature as teaching to the test (Gluckman, 2002; McNeil & Valenzuela 2001; Parker, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Valencia et al., 2001) and for severely narrowing the learning opportunities of children of color, poverty and language difference who attend schools targeted for reforms (Anyon, 1980; Bernstein, 1975; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Farkas, 1990; Finn, 1999; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b; Heath, 1983; Kozol, 1992, 2000; McLaren, 2003).

## Data Analysis of the Teaching Autonomy Scale

Teachers who participated in this study have been involved in the implementation of a curricular reform intended to increase student achievement on the state test of accountability implemented in the school year beginning in 2002. The TAS was selected because it clusters teachers' responses on two dimensions, curricular and general autonomy, allowing for analysis of the data to see if the curricular reform implemented in the district in 2002 is a factor in a teacher's perception of curricular autonomy. Teachers

were presorted into two groups by campus assignment, one low poverty school and one high poverty school. Data collected from all respondents taking the TAS were scored according to the instrument directions, which yields two scores: perceived curricular autonomy and perceived general autonomy. These scores were categorized as low, medium, or high perceptions of teaching autonomy. A two-sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the teachers' scores on the TAS and the teachers' assignment to a school with either low poverty or high poverty student demographic characteristics. The TAS data were analyzed for patterns and descriptive statistics were used to report these patterns, since I predicted a significant correlation between a teacher's perceived teaching autonomy and her school assignment.

Use of the TAS with the two groups of teachers had a three-fold purpose. First, the quantitative measure allowed for sorting the two groups of teachers at the economically diverse campuses into two additional groups, those with high and those with low perceptions of teaching autonomy. Next the TAS scores were used as a selection tool for choosing the teachers to participate in the interview study. Teachers with the highest and lowest scores at the campuses were eligible for selection to participate in the follow-up interview. And finally, item analysis of the TAS provided further data used to assist with answering the research questions. Item analysis showed similarities and differences between teachers' scores on the TAS and any significant relationship to school characteristics. Reporting the school characteristics related to demographics of ethnicity, economic status, and limited English proficiency in the next section gives additional information about study participants and their school assignment.

## Participants

The study was designed to pull participants for comparison from two economically diverse school sites. One school was selected based on serving a high percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged with high poverty defined for the study as 80% or above student participation in the federal free and reduced price lunch program. The other school was selected based on serving a low percentage, 30% or below, of students who qualify for the program. This information is used by the state and district to determine eligibility for federal grant monies under the Title I designation. Therefore, one campus was identified as a Title I school and the other was not. This type of stratified sampling divides teachers into two somewhat homogeneous groups, those who work at a high poverty school and those who work at a low poverty school. Table 1 shows the demographic information and school characteristics of the two campuses that participated in the study. School names were changed to the pseudonyms of Overton and Palomares to protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality of study participants.

Table 1.

*School Characteristics and Demographic Information by Campus*

| School Characteristics & Demographic Info. | Overton Elementary Low Poverty Non-Title I | Palomares Elementary High Poverty Title I |
|---|---|---|
| No. Students | 782 | 895 |
| No. Teachers | 48 | 65 |
| Made AYP | Yes | Yes |
| TEA Rating | Recognized | Acceptable |
| Economic Disadvantage | 19.7% | 93.5% |
| Special Education | 6.4% | 10.3% |
| Limited English Proficient | 6.4% | 52.5% |
| Caucasian | 57.2% | 3.1% |
| African American | 7.8% | 11.8 % |
| Hispanic | 24.4% | 84.8% |
| Asian/ Pac. Islander | 10.5% | 0.2% |
| Native American | 0.1% | 0.0% |

From the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) 2005-2006 report

By selecting participants in this way, I utilized a selection process to test a hypothesis I have about the differences in perceptions of teaching autonomy between the two groups of teachers in order to see if the difference was significant. The disproportionate stratified sampling technique allowed me to obtain the number of participants from each campus to participate in the qualitative study based on how they scored on the TAS. In this way, I had representatives from both schools that scored

highest and lowest on the TAS, who then participated in the follow-up interviews. The ten teachers selected for interviews furthered explained similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy and factors that influence their perceptions. The results of this study, reported in Chapter Four, describe the processes used to understand how perceptions of teaching autonomy during the implementation of NCLB policy influences practice at the classroom level. As Guba & Lincoln (1982) purported, "sampling is almost never representative or random, but purposive, intended to exploit competing views and fresh perspectives as fully as possible" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 246). From this perspective, I purposefully sorted and included candidates for the follow-up interviews that provided further insight into the factors that influence how teachers perceive their teaching autonomy as it relates to school assignment and accountability environment.

## Selection Process

Participants were recruited from two public elementary schools that operate in an urban setting in the central Texas area. Sixty-four teachers at Palomares Elementary were invited to take the TAS at a faculty meeting in early December of 2006, and 25 chose to participate in the study and responded to the questionnaire. Forty-eight teachers at Overton were invited to take the TAS at a faculty meeting in early November of 2006 and 25 responded. Participants who volunteered to stay and fill out the TAS were given informed consent that described the purpose of the study and the confidentiality measures that were taken to insure their privacy (See Appendix A, p. 210, Informed Consent). The 25 teachers at Palomares Elementary combined with the 25 teachers from Overton Elementary combined for total sample of 50 teachers. The first initial of the campus

name and a number from 2 to 51 was assigned to each teacher in the sample. Raw scores on the TAS were summed using the scoring criteria developed by Pearson & Hall (1993) (See Appendix B, p. 208, Scoring Directions for the TAS) and teachers were sorted into categories of high, medium and low perceptions of teaching autonomy for selection to the interview study.

*Qualitative Data*

Intensive Interviewing

While an interview has been described as "a directed conversation (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, 1995); intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had relevant experiences" (cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). In *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Charmaz (2006) suggests achieving a certain flow in the interview protocol by asking questions first that will put the interviewee at ease, shifting to a few broad open-ended questions and then to more focused questions that allow participants to explore the topic of the research in ways they are not usually asked to do. To end the interview, she recommends using questions that "bring the participant back to a normal conversational level" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 30). Charmaz goes on to describe a certain rhythm and pace achieved in the intensive interview that has its origins in grounded theory developed by Glaser & Strauss in 1967. In their seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser & Straus (1967) described a method for conducting research with specific methodology that was different from the descriptive qualitative studies of the time. Data gathered by the researchers was analyzed in various ways throughout the collection process in an iterative fashion. Their unique method of data analysis allowed them to develop theories grounded in the data

rather than identifying existing theories outside the data to explain the phenomena studied. In the literature review, I reported existing theories that provide a framework for understanding the layers of influence on teaching autonomy for the purpose of outlining a context for this research. In Chapter Four, I report the discovery of an original grounded theory that reveals the respondents' theories about the nature of teaching autonomy and the various factors they identified as influences to their teaching autonomy in the current policy environment.

## Interview Protocol

The interview protocol for this study was organized to allow respondents to provide in-depth information, thoughts, feelings and explanations regarding their perceived level of teaching autonomy as it relates to their day-to-day practice and experiences at their campus (See Appendix D, p. 210, Interview Protocol). Following the suggestion of Kathy Charmaz (2006) the interview protocol was designed to flow from open-ended questions, to more probing questions that required teachers to talk about their perceptions of teaching autonomy with regard to student achievement, curriculum, NCLB policy and their teaching assignments. In addition, the interview protocol has questions designed to have teachers elaborate on the items from the TAS identified by Pearson & Hall (1993) as related to teaching autonomy. The interview data expanded the information given by the teachers scores on the TAS and school assignment characteristics and provided further insight into factors that influence teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy in this climate of high accountability to district, state and federal policy tied to mandated reforms.

## Confidentiality

A heading on the TAS questionnaire asked teachers for their name, and phone number, so that participants were not anonymous, but confidential. Pearson & Hall (1993) found that perceptions of teaching autonomy using the TAS did not differ by gender, age, degree held, or even years of experience, as they had predicted, so this information was not asked for on the questionnaire. However, respondents selected to participate in the interview were asked questions which allowed them to reveal this information. The sample of 50 teachers reported name and telephone number on the TAS, so that they could be contacted to participate in the follow-up interview if their scores met the selection criteria of either highest or lowest perceptions of teaching autonomy at their campus. All questionnaires were assigned a number representing a teacher and a letter that corresponded to the first initial of the school name, "O" for Overton or, "P" for Palomares. In Chapter Four, teachers are not referred to by name, and their confidentiality was further assured by use of these campus pseudonyms. There were 40 teachers who took the TAS who were not selected to participate in the interview. All 50 questionnaires were analyzed as data that informed the study. The TAS measure allowed for sorting the teachers from Overton and Palomares into two additional groups based on their scores, those who perceived high teaching autonomy and those who perceived low teaching autonomy at the time of the administration. This information is reported in the study results in Chapter Four.

## Selection of Informants for the Follow-Up Interviews

I selected teachers to interview from the pool of respondents in the quantitative study using the idea of maximum variation sampling so that teachers were included that

maximized the differences on the specified characteristics of perceived teaching autonomy (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Teachers whose scores met these criteria, which were those scoring highest and lowest on the TAS, were contacted by phone and asked if they would like to participate in the follow-up interview. Ten of the 19 teachers who met the criteria for selection agreed to be interviewed. Results of the data analysis used to determine eligibility for selection to the interview cohort is reported in more detail in Chapter Four.

## Interview Procedure

Each teacher selected to participate in the follow-up interview was asked to meet the researcher at a mutually agreed upon, neutral site where the interview was tape-recorded. A semi-structured interview procedure was utilized, in order to have all participants respond to a general set of questions while still allowing informants to go beyond the questions and for the researcher to allow individuals to digress from the protocol, if they so desired. Terms used in the study: autonomy, efficacy, agency and authority were defined at the beginning of the interview, so that a common understanding of these terms was attempted prior to the interview. The researcher paid a transcriber to type all tape recordings of the interviews and the original tapes were returned to the researcher and kept in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher listened to the transcribed interview tapes and compared them to the transcriber's typed version to ensure accuracy of the transcription. The transcript was then reformatted to a new document and initial coding of the transcript was conducted using Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006) grounded theory method. Further analysis of the transcripts using classical, or Glaserian GT method is described in the next section. The coded transcriptions were

identified by a number and by the first letter of the teacher's school assignment (i.e., O: 16).

## Coding

Interview transcripts were coded using classical grounded theory method (Glaser, 1993, 2002; Charmaz, 2006), which allows the researcher to construct a theory grounded in the data as it emerges in the analysis. There are two phases in grounded theory coding: initial and focused coding. During the initial coding phase, the interview transcripts were studied as fragments of collected data: words, lines, phrases, and descriptions of incidents, with the purpose of giving meaning to the data based on analytic interpretation. In this phase, the codes assigned by the researcher should stick closely to the data, show actions, thoughts and feelings of the interviewees and indicate how the researcher attempts to portray the meaning (Charmaz, 2006). In the focused phase of coding, the categories emerged from the data and the theoretical direction became apparent. Grounded theory coding is different from other qualitative methods that assign preconceived categories to the data; instead, the codes are created by the data and analyzed many times by the researcher in the recursive process of trying to make meaning from the perspective of the interviewee.

## Memo Writing

Leading up to the process of reporting the findings of the interview data, a grounded theorist will write "memos". "Memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection, coding, and writing drafts of papers…and constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Memo writing is the construction of

analytic notes based on codes developed in the focused phase of coding the interview data. Memo writing helps the researcher focus on categories and fully explore the meanings while also looking for patterns in the verbatim data pulled from the interview text. Teachers also used *in vivo* codes, which described specialized terms, acronyms, or commonly held understandings regarding processes and procedures known in the field of education. These codes were analyzed for contributions to the grounded theory of teaching autonomy developed in Chapter Four.

## Constant Comparative Analysis

Once the data were coded, the act of constant comparative analysis was utilized to mine the transcript data for a common theoretical code (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1993, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). In practical terms, the act of constant comparative analysis required the researcher to compare incident with incident, using both the transcript and questionnaire data to look for patterns. This is a recursive process by which incidents are described and then looked for in other transcripts. Similar incidents are raised to the conceptual level and categorized. Through the constant comparative process a theory emerges that is based on the theoretical code found in the study data.

## Theoretical Coding

Once discovered in the data, the theoretical code explained the most variance between categories and presented a unifying concept that explained the phenomenon of teaching autonomy. This finding is reported in detail in Chapter Four. Once the theoretical code is established, the researcher is required to conduct theoretical sampling, which is Glaser's method of reaching data saturation in the study. Theoretical sampling is a recursive process, whereby the researcher looks to the relevant literature to inform

and explain the theory developing from the data analysis and then looks back into the data collected to bring the theory to the point where no new properties or patterns of the properties of the conceptual categories is forthcoming (Glaser, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). At this point, the researcher develops and reports an original grounded theory that explains the phenomenon of teaching autonomy. This theory is presented in Chapter Four.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a grounded theory study is achieved through a process, which is unlike most qualitative studies. Glaser (2002) describes this difference in the journal article, *Conceptualization: On theory and theorizing using grounded theory method*:

> Inviting participants to review the theory for whether or not it is their voice is wrong as a "check" or "test" on validity. They may or may not understand the theory, or even like the theory if they do understand it. Many do not understand the summary benefit of concepts that go beyond description to a transcending bigger picture. GT is generated from much data, of which many participants may be empirically unaware. GT is applicable to the participants as an explanation of the preponderance of their ongoing behaviour which is how they are resolving their main concern, which they may not be aware of conceptually, if at all. It is just what they do! GT is not their voice: it is a generated abstraction from their doings and their meanings that are taken as data for the conceptual generation. When naming concepts, GT does not try to give a "concern to understand the world of the research participants as they construct it" (Glaser, 1998). GT is not "an enquiry that makes sense of and is true to the

> understanding of ordinary actors in the everyday world" (Glaser, 1998). GT uncovers many patterns the participant does not understand or is not aware of, especially the social fictions that may be involved (Glaser, 2002, p. 5).

Because of this difference between grounded theory method and qualitative descriptive analysis, the traditional measure of trustworthiness, which is to invite study participants to check the theory for validity, was not utilized. The generation of new theory is the primary goal of grounded theory method. Unlike other qualitative methods, grounded theory is not concerned with verification of the theory, but rather with generation of the theory. Therefore, at the stage of the analysis where the grounded theory was developed, another graduate student, members of the dissertation committee, and a mentor principal familiar with the study conducted "member-checking" in the more traditional sense of determining the reasonableness of the theory based on the data. These members provided feedback on the theory of teaching autonomy proposed in Chapter Four. This theory attempts to make meaning from the patterns discovered in the data, and offers a theoretical framework based on the theoretical codes I found and labeled in the data.

## Reporting the Findings

Since this study utilized a mixed method design, the findings are reported in three sections in Chapter Four. The first section reports the quantitative data on perceptions of teaching autonomy and significance of the relationship to the characteristics of the teachers' school assignment. The second section presents the qualitative interview data and the theoretical explanation of the phenomenon that arises from using a grounded theory method to analyze the transcripts and TAS data. In a third section, the findings of

the two studies are synthesized and analyzed as a whole to lay the foundation for discussion in Chapter Five of the implications for practice and recommendations for future research suggested by this theory of teaching autonomy.

# Chapter Four: Results

As yet, a theory that explains the nature of autonomy for the teaching profession has not been fully articulated in the literature. Chapter Four aims to explore a grounded theory of teaching autonomy using data collected from fifty teachers who rated their teaching autonomy using the Pearson & Hall (1993) Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS). Additional data were collected from ten teachers from the original sample who went on to participate in semi-structured interviews which were coded using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory method. The study findings are reported in three parts. Section I reports the quantitative data by campus and teacher. A model for looking at the distribution of scores across the two sites is presented. Descriptive statistics address the findings related to the first research question:

1. What similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I)?

Teachers' scores on the TAS are reported for Overton and Palomares and the data used for selecting the ten teachers who went on to participate in a semi-structured interview are reported in Section I.

In Section II, a grounded theory developed from both sources of data, the TAS scores and the interview transcripts, points to the role identity nature of teaching autonomy. This theory of teaching autonomy began to emerge from the data as teachers' responses to the interview questions regarding issues relative to their autonomy were sorted, coded, resorted, compared and categorized for concepts using Glaser & Strauss (1967) and classical Glaserian GT methods. In this section, I describe the stances teachers

take when they discuss their teaching autonomy as the ability and authority to make important classroom decisions. These stances were coded from patterns of behavior and actions described by teachers at both Overton and Palomares. It became clear that in the public school setting (Title I, or not), no matter what a teacher might rate her perceived teaching autonomy on the TAS, her words belied patterns of behavior that suggest teaching autonomy is actively constructed and mostly independent of campus or TAS score. At both schools, teachers who perceived high teaching autonomy on the TAS described the same behaviors and adopted stances used to construct teaching autonomy that were described by teachers who perceive low autonomy and vice versa. This study was designed to compare perceptions of teaching autonomy at two economically diverse elementary schools, and there were statistically significant differences between the two samples and their scores on the TAS for some of the items on the questionnaire related to general autonomy. These data are reported in Section I.

The transcript data confirmed the inconsistencies between a teacher's TAS score, her workplace, and her attitudes and beliefs about exercising teaching autonomy. Furthermore, using grounded theory method for analysis of transcript data revealed that teaching autonomy is a constructed and transitory phenomenon situated within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). The development of this original grounded theory of teaching autonomy is described in detail in Section II of the chapter.

In Section III of the chapter, findings from the quantitative and qualitative study are synthesized as the last two research questions are addressed:

2. What factors are described by teachers as having an impact on their teaching autonomy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom and how do they connect this to student achievement?
3. In what ways do teachers describe actions of resistance or conformity to mandates that influence their teaching autonomy?

In the last section of the chapter, the three major findings of this study are reported. First, teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy are situational and vary from their fixed score on the TAS. Second, teachers' perceptions of autonomy are not necessarily related to the degree of influence from external authority on the school campus, and third, teaching autonomy originates from states of being enacted through eight identities described by teachers in the study, which were determined by the teacher's stance and role she selected when exercising authority over making the decisions that affect her students and her classroom. Implications of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research are reported in Chapter Five.

*Quantitative Measure: The Teaching Autonomy Scale*

Participants

Sixty-four teachers at Palomares Elementary were invited to take the TAS at a faculty meeting in early December of 2006, and 25 chose to participate in the study and responded to the questionnaire. Forty-eight teachers at Overton were invited to take the TAS at a faculty meeting in early November of 2006 and 25 responded. Combined with the 25 teachers at Palomares Elementary who agreed to participate in the study, the total sample numbered 50 teachers. The first initial of the campus name and a number from 2 to 51 was assigned to each teacher in the sample and raw scores on the TAS were

summed using the scoring criteria developed by Pearson & Hall (1993) as described in chapter three.

To assist in identifying teachers who perceived high and low teaching autonomy in two schools, the sample of 50 teachers who took the TAS (Pearson & Hall, 1993) received a raw score for teaching autonomy based on their responses to the 18 statements on the scale. The scale yields general autonomy scores in the range of 12 to 48 and curricular autonomy scores in the range of six to 24. Mean scores for the sample were calculated by averaging the scores of all participants, and adding and subtracting one standard deviation to the mean, which established the cut points for the scale scores. Table 2 shows the scaled scores used in the study to classify teachers into low, medium, or high teaching autonomy. Teachers who scored in the medium range on perception of teaching autonomy on the TAS were not contacted to participate in the follow-up interviews.

Table 2.

*Cut Points for the Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993)*

| Perception of Teaching Autonomy | Raw Score 18-77 | No. Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| High | 58-65 | 8 |
| Medium | 43-57 | 31 |
| Low | 36-42 | 11 |

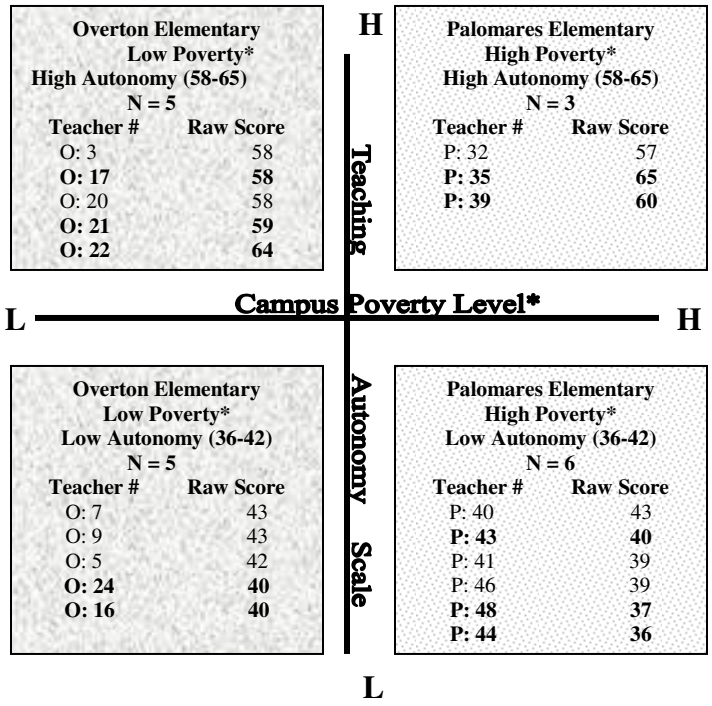
Mean = 50, *SD* = 7, N = 50

The cut-points established the cohorts of teachers who perceived highest and lowest teaching autonomy and these teachers were contacted to participate in the follow-up interviews. By research design, the 50 teachers were already sorted into two groups of 25

based on assignment to a high poverty Title I school, Palomares Elementary, or a low poverty non-Title I school, Overton Elementary. Because student poverty level determines whether a campus is designated to receive Title I funding, which increases accountability to external forms of control, teachers at Overton and Palomares were juxtaposed for comparison. Use of the Pearson & Hall (1993) TAS with the two groups of teachers had a three-fold purpose. First, the quantitative measure allowed for sorting teachers into two additional groups, those with high and those with low perceptions of teaching autonomy. In doing so, teachers fell into one of four quadrants created by the cross section of a continuum of low to high poverty and a continuum of low to high teaching autonomy. Analysis of the data in this manner gave insight into answering the first research question, "What differences and similarities in teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I)?"

*Figure 2.*

Teachers with Highest and Lowest Scores on the Teaching Autonomy Scale by Campus




* Based on student participation in the Federal Free and Reduced Price Breakfast & Lunch Program and designation as a school eligible for Title I funds. Scores of teachers who participated in the interview are shown in bold.

In answering the first question, "What differences and similarities in teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment, high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I?" the model shows that eight teachers, or 16% of the sample, perceive high teaching autonomy. Of those teachers, five (10%) teach at Overton and three (6%) teach at Palomares. Eleven teachers, or 22% of the sample, perceive low teaching autonomy. Five (10%) teachers at Overton and six (12%) teachers at Palomares comprised the low autonomy group. These findings suggest that fewer teachers at the Title I school perceived high teaching autonomy when compared to teachers at the non-Title I school. However, due to the small sample size, the difference between Overton and Palomares

teachers who perceived high autonomy is not statistically significant. The data show the number of teachers who perceive low autonomy were nearly equal at Overton and Palomares. These results suggest teachers at both campuses perceive impositions to their teaching autonomy in the current climate of high accountability, regardless of student poverty level or Title I status of the campus.

## Selection of Teachers for Interviews

The second, and more important purpose, for use of the TAS in this study was as a selection tool for determining the interview cohort. By sorting the teachers into the four categories as shown in Figure 2, ten teachers were selected for further participation in the qualitative study. In selecting the teachers who would participate in the interviews, candidates from both schools who rated themselves low or high on either or both dimension of teaching autonomy formed the initial pool of eligible participants. From this group, I purposefully selected ten teachers who had the lowest and highest scores at each of the two campuses. The interview cohort was, therefore, comprised of five teachers with low autonomy and five teachers with high autonomy and the selected teachers' scores are shown in bold in Figure 2. Five teachers work at Overton and five teachers work at Palomares. Table 3 depicts information for comparison of each of the ten participants' raw scores on the TAS, the grade level taught and campus assignment. Grade level taught was added for reference to whether state testing affects the teacher. In Texas, grade levels tested on the state assessment are third through eleventh grades and subjects tested are math, reading, writing, science and social studies. Therefore, four teachers with perceptions of high autonomy do not have direct responsibilities to state mandated tests used for NCLB accountability. The same held true for the teachers with

perceptions of low autonomy, four of the sample does not teach at a grade level with direct responsibilities to state testing. This seems to indicate that a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy is unrelated to the teacher's grade level or state testing requirements.

Table 3.

*Teachers Selected for Interviews by Campus*

| O: Overton Teachers (n = 5) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Respondent | Assignment | TAS Score |
| O: 22 | ESL First | 64 High |
| O: 21 | Special Ed. | 59 High |
| O: 17 | First | 58 High |
| O: 16 | First | 40 Low |
| O: 24 | Fifth | 40 Low |
| P: Palomares Teachers (n = 5) | | |
| P: 35 | Art Teacher | 65 High* |
| P: 39 | Fourth | 60 High |
| P: 43 | Bilingual First | 40 Low |
| P: 48 | Bilingual K | 37 Low |
| P: 44 | First | 36 Low* |

*Palomares teachers scored highest and lowest on the measure.

*Similarities and Differences in Teaching Autonomy Scores by Campus*

A third purpose for the use of the questionnaire was to look for similarities and differences between participants' responses to the 18-item questionnaire at the two campuses. The first research question asks, "What differences and similarities in

teacher's perceptions of autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I)"? Analysis of the answers by campus to the 18-items on the TAS for the entire sample of 50 teachers was conducted using the SYSTAT program. A two-sample t-test revealed significant differences ($P < .05$) by campus for items 1, 2, 3, and 11. Results of the analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 4**.**

*Significance of Difference In Means by Item and Campus on the TAS*

| TAS Item | MO** | MP** | MP-MO | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Freedom to be creative | 3.56 | 3.08 | -0.48 | P < .05 |
| 2. Control of learning activities | 3.36 | 2.92 | -0.44 | P < .05 |
| 3. My standards of behavior | 3.64 | 3.24 | -0.40 | P < .05 |
| 4. No job discretion | 3.04 | 2.68 | -0.36 | Not significant |
| 5. Own guidelines & procedures | 2.80 | 2.56 | -0.24 | Not significant |
| 6. Little say over content | 2.04 | 2.20 | 0.16 | Not significant |
| 7. Control of schedule and time | 3.04 | 2.68 | -0.36 | Not significant |
| 8. My goals and objectives | 2.04 | 1.92 | -0.12 | Not significant |
| 9. Seldom use alternate procedures | 3.24 | 2.88 | 0.36 | P < .1* |
| 10. Use own instructional guides | 2.60 | 2.52 | -0.08 | Not significant |
| 11. Limited latitude to solve probs. | 1.88 | 2.56 | 0.68 | P <. 05 |
| 12. I determine what I teach | 2.00 | 2.16 | 0.16 | Not significant |

| TAS Item | MO** | MP** | MP-MO | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. Little control over space | 3.64 | 3.76 | 0.12 | Not significant |
| 14. Chose my own materials | 2.80 | 2.80 | 0.00 | Not significant |
| 15. Others select assessments | 2.80 | 2.68 | -0.12 | Not significant |
| 16. I select methods | 3.40 | 3.48 | 0.08 | Not significant |
| 17. Little say over use of time | 2.96 | 2.56 | -0.40 | P < .2* |
| 18. I select content and skills | 1.96 | 1.92 | -0.04 | Not significant |
| Overall General Autonomy | 37.24 | 35.12 | -2.12 | P ≤ .101* |
| Overall Curricular Autonomy | 13.64 | 13.56 | -0.08 | Not Significant |

* Surmised that significance would increase, (i.e. P would decrease) with a larger sample size of 100 participants. ** Mean Overton, Mean Palomares, Difference in Means using Two-Sample t-test, n =50

Item 9 was significant at the p< .1 level and item 17 was close to being significant at the p < .2 level, as well as, overall general autonomy at p ≤ .11 level, but due to the small sample size, I surmise that lack of significance at the p< .05 level for these items is due to the small number of cases. To test this idea, a t-test was conducted that replicated the responses of the Overton and Palomares teachers to increase the sample size to 100. This replication essentially created a data set with a dummy sample of 100 respondents, a sample that would have the same pattern of responses as the original sample of 50. When conducting the t-test on items 9 and 17 using dummy data that doubled the existing data set to 100 respondents, significance was achieved at the p <. 05 level. Using this same t-test, General Autonomy increased in statistical significance to the p < .05 level. This supports the assertion that lack of significance on some of the items on the scale is likely due to having only 50 teachers respond to the questionnaire.

Further analysis of the most significant ($p < .05$) items 1, 2, 3, and 11 reveals that teachers at Palomares perceive they are not as free to be creative in their teaching approach as teachers at Overton and are less likely to select an alternative procedure when teaching. Palomares teachers also perceive less control over the selection of student learning activities. Perception of ability to set classroom behavior standards was also lower for teachers at Palomares. Furthermore, Palomares teachers perceive they have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved, while Overton teachers perceive more autonomy to influence how major problems are solved. The differences between the two campuses on these four items, all which relate to perceptions of general autonomy, supports the research hypothesis that teachers at Palomares would perceive a work environment where they have less creativity and less involvement in important classroom decision making, like selection of learning activities and standards for classroom behavior. In addition, teachers at Palomares have an overall lower perception of general autonomy, which Pearson and Hall (1993) identified as the factors related to "classroom standards of conduct and personal on-the-job discretion". Teachers at Palomares revealed in more depth in the transcript data how the external authority measures related to teaching at a Title I, high poverty campus (for example frequent monitoring for compliance and implementation of reform initiatives) contributed to their low perceptions of creativity and ability to make important decisions.

However, in looking at the similarities of the teachers' perceptions, the item analysis shows that teachers perceive teaching autonomy with regard to being able to select content, methods, strategies, goals, objectives, guidelines and procedures about the same at the two schools. Both groups of teachers perceive a similar ability to structure

their time, set their classroom schedule and structure their classroom space. In this regard, the two campuses are more alike than different in their responses to 14 out of 18 items on the TAS (without taking the small sample size into account). The fact that many of the 14 items are related to perceptions of curricular autonomy, suggests that teachers at both campuses do not perceive freedom to stray from the state and district mandated curriculum. Pearson & Hall (1993) defined curricular autonomy as factors related to "issues concerning the selection of activities, materials, and instructional planning and sequencing" (p. 177). This finding suggests that teachers at both sites perceive curricular autonomy mostly independently of campus characteristics such as assignment to a high poverty Title I school versus assignment to a low poverty non-Title I campus. This is likely due to the fact that any school's curriculum must align with that enforced by the district and the state. This finding indicates that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) dictate to all teachers in the state a level of compliance that creates similar perceptions regarding teaching autonomy where curriculum, content standards and pacing are concerned. Further similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions of the curricular and general dimensions of teaching autonomy at the two sites are discussed in the qualitative study and a theory about the nature of teaching autonomy is proposed.

*Qualitative Analysis: Ten Teachers Discuss Teaching Autonomy*

To better understand the differences and similarities of the teachers who rated their perceptions of teaching autonomy for this study, a purposefully selected sample of ten teachers with the lowest and highest scores on the TAS were chosen to participate in a follow up interviews (See Figure 2). The initial contact interview took place in December of 2006 and January of 2007 and took respondents approximately one hour to

complete. Over ten hours of interview data were transcribed and responses were initially sorted by question, low or high teaching autonomy, and campus assignment. Using Glaser & Strauss (1967) and classic grounded theory method, these data were sorted and categorized multiple ways using the constant comparative method. As teachers described stances they took when discussing actions related to teaching autonomy, a role identity theory of teaching autonomy began to emerge.

The teachers' stances, represented by the focused codes emerging from the data, were analyzed across the ten transcripts and were categorized through the symbolic actions taken when teachers in the study exerted control over the key decisions regarding their classroom. Memo writing on the stances teacher's take when exercising or deferring teaching autonomy further developed the role identity theory. Memos elaborated the categories, which represented the stances, and were associated with the symbolic actions described by teachers operating from that viewpoint. Teachers described action plans that revealed use of a strategy for justifying their stance regarding teaching autonomy for given situations. Through theoretical coding, the stances and action plans came to be represented by the following identities: *acting professionally* became *the professional*, *questioning* became *the critic*, *conferring expert status* became *the novice*, *having a specialty position* became *the specialist*, *resisting* became *the activist*, *teaming and collaborating* became *the supporter*, *complying with authority* became *the follower*, and *biding time and withdrawing from conflict* became *the pacifist*. Role identity theory explained the variance within and between the teacher's behaviors by providing a schema for categorizing their thoughts and actions into the multiple identities that hold the primary source for the plan of action the teacher takes in achieving

her teaching autonomy (McCall & Simmons, 1996). At this point in the development of the theory, a paradox emerged from the ways that teachers, regardless of TAS score, or school assignment, enacted multiple identities and used various symbolic actions to construct and justify their teaching autonomy.

## The Ruler and the Ruled: A Paradox of Teaching Autonomy

Teaching autonomy is theoretically linked to the freedom to choose, identified as a teacher's free will to make the decisions important to her classroom using her professional knowledge. In this study, the nature and forms of teaching autonomy were found to arise from a teacher's stance, or adopted identity regarding her authority to exercise free will over her classroom in a given situation. Perceptions of teaching autonomy stemmed from her beliefs about individual authority and the role she chose in a particular situation for taking or deferring autonomous action. Acting autonomously has a cyclical relationship with asserting authority: in order to act autonomously, you must have authority over your own actions. However, before you can possess the authority to act, you must have autonomy and be free from outside authority. Teachers working in the public school system do not have freedom from outside authority, and would seem, therefore, not to have autonomy. This paradoxical relationship between autonomy and authority presented the two main roles teachers in public schools perform when exercising teaching autonomy: the role of *ruler* and the role of *ruled*. The dialectical relationship of the need to have teaching autonomy and rule over the classroom is in conflict with the need for connectedness and joint decision-making as part of a professional community. Compounding the conflict is the reality of a workplace where top-down decisions are imposed which limit teaching autonomy and create the conditions

in which teachers are ruled over. Thus, the paradox of being both the ruler and the ruled explains how teachers perceive teaching autonomy in a public school system that is at the same time autocratic, democratic and bureaucratic.

Democratic organizational features of the public school, such as the team meeting, where decision making is shared among many, allows the teacher to exercise collective or collaborative teaching autonomy. The democratic environment of shared decision-making in public schools invites the teacher to take the role of *ruler.* Democratic processes in public schools require that stakeholders actively participate in shared-decision making and come to some sort of consensus regarding important educational issues. As with civic engagement in other democratic governance structures, teachers, as professional educators, are expected to bring a level of knowledge and expertise to the decision-making table. In the democratic public school, teachers are valued members of teams charged with making important decisions. This type of empowerment leads to a climate whereby teachers are expected to rule over their classrooms in the traditionally held view of teaching autonomy stemming from conferred status of teacher as a professional educator. When teachers adopt the role of *ruler* over their classroom, they use the four ruler identities and action plans as a way to justify autonomous action. The four ruler identities associated with teaching autonomy discovered in this study are *the professional*, *the specialist*, *the activist* and *the critic.* Each of these identities contain the plan of action the teacher takes to actively assert her teaching autonomy in a role that conveys the teacher as ruler over her professional life.

The bureaucratic features of public schooling, such as top-down mandates that leave little decision making to the teachers, create a paradoxical environment for the

professional educator. Bureaucratic governance structures in public schools demand a professional workforce that will implement rules, policies, school reform initiatives and other mandates without question, or involvement in the decision making process. Yet, even in this authoritarian environment, teachers in the study described actions, patterns of behavior and took stances that indicated they were able to construct teaching autonomy despite their lack of involvement in the decision making process. When external entities impose on the teacher's classroom environment and inhibit teaching autonomy, the teacher is in a situation of being ruled over. The *ruled* role explains how teachers still manage to construct teaching autonomy despite what appears to be a situation calling for absolute compliance with little to no collaborative decision-making. When teachers exercise autonomy through the role of *ruled* over, they adopt the identities and action plans discovered in this study of *the supporter*, *the follower*, *the pacifist* and *the novice*. These four ruled identities show the various action plans taken when a teacher cannot have complete freedom to control the instructional decisions that affect her classroom. These identities allow the teacher to exert passive authority over the classroom, even when external controls would seem to eliminate any teaching autonomy. By switching between these two roles, ruler and ruled, and their associated identities, the public school teacher reconciles the paradox of a profession that is unable to grant its members substantial authority and autonomy, while at the same time valuing the teacher's critical place in the decision making required and expected of a professional educator.

A grounded theory of teaching autonomy allows for the concept to transcend the level of people, time and place, which the study data indicated was needed due to the similarities between the teachers' responses on the TAS at the two campuses. According

to Glaser (1993), a grounded theory describes concepts that are timeless, unlike a qualitative descriptive analysis that soon becomes dated and fixed in time. Rather than describe the state of teaching autonomy at Palomares and Overton in the 2006-2007 school year, Glaser's method demanded that I explore the data for theoretical codes that would describe the nature of teaching autonomy for this study and in the future. Through his process, the theoretical code of role identity found in the study data explained the patterns of behavior described by teachers at both campuses. By taking different stances at different times, depending on the situation, teachers described strategies they took to construct teaching autonomy in the workplace.

During the interview, teachers were asked to talk about their teaching autonomy given situations related to the questions on Pearson & Hall's (1993) TAS, such as how teachers select content, determine pacing, and respond to mandates, initiatives, policies, and programs. The teachers' stance toward these traditionally held actions of teaching autonomy reflected the identity and action plan they used in specific situations. Shifting between ruler role identities (active stances of authority) and ruled role identities (passive stances of authority) teachers construct teaching autonomy while navigating the various governance structures encountered in the public school organization.

Role identity theory posits that the categories determined by the data will have idiosyncratic, as well as conventional aspects that vary according to the person and the situation (McCall & Simons, 1978; D.C. Siebert & D.F. Siebert, 2007). This was apparent in that no teacher in the study was confined to enacting only one role or identity; instead, every teacher moved between the two roles, ruler and ruled, and the associated identities using multiple strategies for constructing autonomy through the various action

plans presented in Table 5. This discovery lends support for the argument developed in this chapter that teaching autonomy is socially constructed, rather than professionally conferred, as well as, transitory and situational. This study reports an original grounded theory of teaching autonomy based on eight different identities teachers in the study described and used to construct or defer teaching autonomy in the public school environment. The ten teachers in the study moved between the eight identities, described in Table 5, depending on the situation and somewhat independently of school assignment and TAS score.

Table 5.

*Roles, Identities and Action Plans for Constructing Teaching Autonomy*

| Ruler Role: Active Stances of Authority | |
|---|---|
| Identities | Action Plans |
| The Activist | Adopts the stance of having to fight for teaching autonomy**.** Works publicly to assert authority by using the strategies of standing up and speaking out, and questioning impositions to her teaching autonomy. Is an active advocate for her position and confidently asserts authority |
| The Critic | Adopts the stance of having seen it all before. Has knowledge of alternate ways of teaching and can usually spot "a fad". Is not necessarily vocal or active in publicly criticizing impositions to her teaching autonomy, but if probed has strong opinions, which are critical. Uses the strategy of critical inquiry and knowledge of pedagogy to achieve teaching autonomy. |
| The Professional | Adopts a stance of "knowing better" and asserts authority primarily by justifying autonomous action through knowledge based on needs of her students and "doing what's best for kids" as well as knowledge of best practices and years of experience. Uses the strategy of speaking as the licensed, credentialed expert to achieve teaching autonomy. |
| The Specialist | Adopts a stance of being outside the impositions to teaching autonomy others have to endure. Asserts authority through special |

| | |
|---|---|
| | status of the position (e.g. special education, art teacher). Is exempt from, or is able to ignore, many impositions to teaching autonomy that "regular" teachers cannot. Uses the strategy of speaking as the specialist to achieve teaching autonomy. |

| Ruled Role: Passive Stances of Authority | |
|---|---|
| Identities | Action Plan |
| The Pacifist | Adopts a stance of non-confrontation and obtains teaching autonomy through withdrawing from the fight. Will often "just shut the classroom door and do what I want". Is willing to quietly bide time--waiting for "the pendulum to swing" and can be a quiet saboteur to change initiatives. |
| The Supporter | Adopts a stance of "being up on" the latest initiative or policy. Does not see the policy as an imposition to autonomous action, and easily matches behavior to what is expected by the external authority because of this collaborative agreement. Uses the strategy of trusting others to make good decisions, which they can positively support, and conferring authority. |
| The Novice | Adopts the stance of needing to be told what to do by "someone smarter than me". Uses the strategy of taking what has been given to her and personalizing the implementation by developing the "how" or process of teaching. The novice is just beginning to craft her practice and lacks confidence that her professional knowledge is as valuable as expert knowledge. |

| | |
|---|---|
| The Follower | Adopts the stance of "going along" with the initiative. Uses the strategy of doing what is needed to appear in compliance. Is neither critical nor supportive, but does what she is told. Is satisfied with constructing autonomy through creative process exercised within the imposed limits. |

*Ruler Roles: Actively Asserting Authority and Constructing Teaching Autonomy*

When teachers rule over their classroom domain, they actively assert authority and construct their teaching autonomy using the overt strategies identified in the action plans of the activist, the critic, the specialist and the professional. The primary strategies of the ruler identities presented in the study data are questioning, critiquing, acting professionally, and resisting. Ruler role identities are adopted by teachers under different circumstances and with different outcomes, but always with a goal to take active control of the classroom by asserting personal decision-making authority. The ruler acts from a position of advocacy, knowledge, critical inquiry, superiority and professionalism. The ruler role asserts, "I am in charge and I am the one making the decisions"(P: 39). Teachers' perceptions of their autonomy on the TAS, whether high or low, were not predictive of use of the four ruler role identities. In other words, the ruler role and its four identities are not exclusively adopted by teachers with high autonomy and are just as likely to be adopted by teachers with low autonomy. In trying to answer the first research question, "What similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty Title I or low poverty non Title I)?" the findings of this study are that a high or low perception on the quantitative measure did not fully explain how teachers perceive

teaching autonomy in the public elementary school of the accountability era. However, the climate of accountability, especially when understood as related to whether the teacher works at a Title I school or not, did have some bearing on teachers' use of specific identities. Teachers at Palomares, the Title I school in the study, were subjected to far more impositions to their teaching autonomy from NCLB as a result of Title I status and labeling by the district as a Focus School, than were teachers at Overton. This was supported in the quantitative study finding that teachers at Palomares did not feel free to be creative in their teaching or to select student-learning activities at the same level as Overton teachers. The activist identity, that of strongly advocating a position contrary to that imposed by external authority, was prevalent in the action plans of Palomares teachers, while only one Overton teacher described use of activist behaviors. This finding reveals one difference between school setting and teachers' use of the ruler role identities to construct autonomy. In the following section, the four ruler role identities, *the activist, the critic, the specialist* and *the professional* are further delineated and supported by the transcript data.

*The Activist Identity*

Through *the activist* identity, teachers assert personal authority over their classrooms and construct autonomy by engaging in actions that indicate a need to fight for what they believe is the right thing to do. This ruler role identity is associated with certain risks because the teacher is vocal in her disagreement over a policy or practice that has been imposed by external authority. Teachers who operate from the point of view of the activist are strong advocates for *their* position. Activists want to convince others and themselves that their position is the right one. Teachers use the activist

identity when external authority challenges a teacher's professional knowledge creating a conflict that cannot be ignored.

Conflict at Palomares arose over implementation of a mandated reading program called Reading First. While some teachers actively campaigned for the program, others actively campaigned against the implementation of the 90-minute scripted reading intervention. Reading First is an example of an imposed, externally made, top-down decision that affects the structure of the school day, the emphasis placed on a single subject, and the role of the teacher in program delivery and in the very process of educating her students. At Palomares, one teacher, who rated her teaching autonomy low, explained the conflict, "People from outside the school, or administration from the school, have come in and said, you are not doing a good job obviously from the test scores, so we're just going to tell you what to do" (P: 44). Teachers who are told they are not doing a good job feel threatened as professionals. "I don't know what they're going to do to me…fire me is the worse thing, I guess" (P: 44). The implication here is that the teacher is unable to make the best decision for her classroom and that a mandated program will fix the problem of low test scores. Teachers in this situation are more likely to adopt the activist identity because their professionalism has been challenged. The activist is willing to publicly push back and challenge top-down mandates and threats to her professionalism. In this scenario, the activist will advocate for an alternate way that better matches the teacher's understanding of appropriate instructional strategies to employ with her students. The advocacy stance used by the activist is related to the stance of "knowing better than the external authority" used by the professional identity. Teachers who use the action plan of the activist to construct autonomy use the arguments

contained in these stances, " I know better, and I must advocate for my students" to fight for her position. Teachers operating from the activist stance will openly challenge others at meetings and support her arguments with concrete data and evidence, not just opinion and assumption.

> I'm pretty vocal, I'm pretty outspoken and I have no problem with being *the one* who stands up and says, I disagree and it's not going to work and I think we should do this instead and they usually say, "Do it anyway. You're right, but do it anyway." I get that a lot, that's really great (*sarcastically*). Like with the Reading First, when it first came, they said, you have to do this with your kids everyday, with every kid no matter what. I asked, "What if I just assessed them and I have the assessment results saying they've mastered that skill"? I was told, "Well, do it anyway, but just do it really fast." I don't have time to do it really fast, like there's no time in the day. So, after arguing for a certain amount of minutes you just say, "Okay" and then you go in your classroom and you don't do it (P: 44).

Experiencing the dissonance between personal pedagogical beliefs and externally imposed beliefs inspires teachers to play the activist role. Generally, the first action of *the activist* is openly questioning authority and engaging others in public discussion. Overtly, teachers may challenge external authority by standing up and speaking out at a faculty or team meeting, contacting others individually and eliciting their support, or by actively engaging in debate about a process or program.

The *questioning* strategy used by activists is related to the *acting professionally* strategy used by the professional identity, in that "*knowing better*" than an outside authority is involved. The action plan performed by the activist describes her attempt to reconcile what she knows is best with what has been imposed as best for her students. First, the teacher stands up and speaks out against a one-size-fits-all reading program that she knows will not work with all of her students. How does she know this? Because she has assessed her students, and the scripted lessons required by the Reading First program do not fit with the needs of some of the children in her classroom. Some students are achieving at a higher reading level, and some are achieving at a lower level. For both groups of students she deems the scripted lessons inappropriate. She then uses the strategy of questioning, overtly in the public forum of a meeting by asking how she is to reconcile this mismatch between the requirements of the imposed program and her professional knowledge about her students and their needs, which are based on recent assessment data. An entity well known in education as '*they*' give her an unsatisfactory answer. They tell her to just "do it anyway", disregarding her professionalism (P: 44). In addition, the answer given by external authority does not resolve the question, so she asserts authority, covertly this time, by shutting the door and doing what she knows is best for her kids--she retains her professionalism, but she does so at risk. She may lose her job if *they* find out she is not implementing the program as mandated.

The outcome of taking the stance of the activist can vary and activists do not always win their positions but must learn to compromise. In the case of a bilingual first grade teacher at Palomares, who rated her teaching autonomy low, the required 90-minute long Reading First Program left her with no time to conduct a required daily

lesson in English as a Second Language (ESL). By adopting the activist identity, the bilingual teachers advocated for their program, called for a meeting to discuss the problem, and came up with a compromised solution.

> Well, you have to compromise some areas and make it work. I had a hard time with the Scott Foresman Reading First Program because it cut my time to teach ESL. I mean, these people thought about everything, but not the bilingual kids that have an extra subject area to be taught, which is ESL, and there was no time left for that in the schedule. So we got together (the bilingual teachers) and we talked about it in that meeting. We talked about it and we came out of the meeting with a solution. So, now I have to reduce and take from all the subjects: math, science, and social studies, a little bit of time here, a little bit of time there, so I can make up at least 25 to 30 minutes. Now, I can teach ESL – a lesson of ESL. They gave me all this material for ESL, too, but they don't give me time to teach it? I mean, it's kind of hard to do a good job teaching when you don't have the time (P: 43).

In another case at Palomares, the art teacher, who perceived the highest autonomy in the sample of ten teachers, described a situation where a principal called him at home over the summer to inform him he would be moving out of the art room to a portable classroom and that his art room would be turned into a computer lab. He described actions he took to exercise some authority over the decision, which was made without his input.

> So she called me one summer and said, I'm going to move you to a portable, and I went, but that's an art room – it's got four sinks and the kiln room and it's got this storage room and I need all the spaces, it's an art room. She said, 'I'm sorry I need that for the computer room; I'm going to divide in half for the little ones', so there was a big tug of war with the (district) coordinator – me, her (the principal), and she (the principal) won. Some of those computers, I think they were very outdated computers that were donated, which later I learned that they weren't really usable so, I realized I was out in the portable for seven years and I could have been back in my room. So, finally after seven years, I got my room back when we got a new principal (P: 35).

The art teacher elicited the help of the district coordinator to help him advocate for keeping the room that had been designed as an art classroom. However, the principal still won the fight over the classroom and the art teacher taught art in a portable classroom for seven years. It was not until a change in administration occurred that he was successful in "winning" the fight over use of classroom space. Sometimes the activist sees that no amount of advocacy and overt action is going to lead to a compromise or a consensus and she turns to the pacifist identity, which is dialectically related to the activist identity. When overt action is thwarted, teachers may go underground and "just do what I know is best" (P: 44, P: 43). In this regard, teachers continue to exert power over external sources of authority by using a time-honored technique-- "shutting the classroom door, and doing what's best for my kids" (P: 44). When the activist identity is pushed to this point, they transfer from *the ruler* role to *the ruled* role identity of *the pacifist* and go underground.

In the case of the art teacher, he quietly bided time in the portable classroom until he saw an opportunity with a change in leadership to fight for his position and "win" back his classroom.

The primary purpose of performing the activist role on school campuses is to advocate for change in practices based on professional knowledge. Therefore, the teacher who constructs teaching autonomy from this stance serves an important purpose of giving voice to a position that seeks to challenge impositions to teaching autonomy that do not reflect best practices. In the democratic governance structure of the public school, teachers who perform the activist ruler role provide the voice that allows for exchange of ideas necessary for organizational change. In the bureaucratic governance structure of the public school, teachers who use the activist identity to construct teaching autonomy present a problem for bureaucrats who expect mandates to be followed without question. One teacher at Overton, who perceived low teaching autonomy, described the uncomfortable feeling she would get when openly asking questions to principals about "whatever the district was mandating next" (O: 24). An assertive stance, coupled with using the strategies of questioning and advocating for their position, makes the activist identity one which teachers may be hesitant to assume.

*The Professional Identity*

Through *the professional* identity, teachers assert personal authority over their classrooms and gain teaching autonomy by adopting the stance of "knowing better" than external sources of authority. This stance justifies the teachers' autonomous action because it is based on their expert, firsthand, professional knowledge. When teachers "know better" than an external source of authority, they enact one of traditionally held,

and highly valued tenets of teacher professionalism, that of exerting individual autonomy based on expert authority. "You know your students and you make the decisions"(P: 39) is the mantra of the professional identity. In the focused coding stage of analyzing transcript data, *acting professionally* was a stance that originated from teachers who perceived high autonomy in the quantitative measure, two of whom are specialists (O: 21, P: 35). However, using Glaser's idea of theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis, the focused code developed into the concept of the professional identity and the action plan was discovered in the transcripts of all ten teachers, regardless of autonomy score or school site. This finding communicated that every teacher in the study constructs teaching autonomy through *the ruler* role identity of *the professional*. This is likely because society confers an imagined and idealized view of teachers as professionals, a conceptualization that is legitimized when teachers perform the action plan of the professional role identity.

Like the activist identity, the professional identity action plan allows teachers to construct teaching autonomy when they disregard external authority over their classroom because it conflicts with their professional knowledge. Teachers in the study defined professional knowledge as, knowledge of student needs, best practices and instructional technologies (e.g. data-driven decision making, and pacing). The professional identity operates from knowledge of students' needs and clear beliefs about best practice which allows the teacher to take confident, autonomous action. When teachers in the study were asked to discuss impositions to their teaching autonomy they identified implementation of the instructional planning guides (IPG's) as a primary barrier to their autonomous decision-making. Teachers in the study justified making decisions for their classroom that

veered from the curriculum document based on knowledge of their students' needs. This viewpoint of "knowing better" than the curriculum document illustrates a claim central to the action plan of the professional identity. When teachers claim the *in vivo* code, "knowing better" than an outside authority what her students need, she receives role support. Role support is given by others and confirms for the teacher that her idealized view of self as professional educator is valued and legitimized. The ten teachers in the study identified personal knowledge of student need as usurping imposed knowledge of student needs from external sources. Teachers explained autonomous actions that veer from what is mandated are allowable and expected when the teacher rejects the imposition based on knowledge of what's best for her students. "The student's needs drive my autonomy. I am the one making the decisions on what to teach to those children based on their needs" (O: 21). In this case, the special education teacher uses the stance of "knowing better" to justify the selection and pacing of content that differed from what an external authority imposed (use of IPG's) on the classroom by performing the professional identity.

Another way teachers assert authority from the professional stance of "knowing better" is through development of knowledge about teaching and learning that comes from experience and professional development. "I think the more sense of autonomy a teacher has, the better for him or her and the students, because you know your students and you make the decisions" (P: 39). Teaching autonomy that is achieved through acting professionally from a stance of knowing better allows teachers to filter out the myriad of mandates, initiatives, and top-down decisions that they believe have no relevancy to their students and classroom. The teacher using the professional identity feels personally

accountable for the progress of her students. She does not rely on outside authority to tell her about the achievement level of her students. State testing scores are but one measure of student progress and the professional knows many other ways of assessing what her students know.

> I know that they are achieving or mastering what I need them to, or want them to, by assessments more that I make myself, as opposed to district assessments. And, of course, we are held accountable by TAKS and benchmarks, but I feel that personally I'm accountable. That weighs far more on me than the TAKS tests that come at the end of the year. Day to day, I know that one lost year with these kids is a lot; they can't afford to lose a year. I hold myself personally accountable for them, and then the TAKS and the benchmarks, that's just extra (P: 39).

Teachers who obtain their teaching autonomy from the stance of the professional identity usually experience a positive outcome, which carries less risk than the other ruler role action plans of the activist, or critic identity. Asserting authority by acting professionally, especially when based on knowledge of student's needs is a highly valued form of exercising teaching autonomy. When teachers use the *acting professionally* strategy to gain autonomy they may increase or gain respect from peers and administrators, as in this kindergarten teacher with low autonomy who noticed her students were not getting the material as planned, "So I changed my lesson plans for the week and my principal did walk in and she was pleased that I knew that I needed to go and re-teach, or teach that skill, before I could move on " (P: 48). This validation by an external authority confirms for the teacher that she should, and is expected, to make adjustments to the lesson plan

cycle as needed based on her professional knowledge of her students' needs. Acting professionally gives this teacher autonomy and the respect earned establishes trust for the teacher's future ability to be free to make important decisions, "I think in that sense, we do have a lot of freedom (P: 48).

When teachers gain the trust of an external authority to make good decisions regarding the classroom it has positive outcomes and serves to legitimate the use of the professional identity. The professional identity receives role support more readily than the other identities teachers use to garner teaching autonomy. The idea of teaching autonomy as a professional courtesy given to teachers who are knowledgeable implies trust in their ability to know what students need. "I feel like I've always been given the professional courtesy, or the autonomy to do what I know is right for the kids. To get the kids where I think they need to be however I can" (O: 17).

The primary purpose for using the professional identity to construct teaching autonomy is that the teacher's noncompliance with impositions to teaching autonomy is most easily justified from the position of the professional. Administrators, district office personnel, parents and community members expect teachers to know the best practices that will achieve results with their students. An ESL, first grade teacher explained, "Some of the IPG's have conflicted with my professional autonomy, for instance, when we were looking through the phonics sequence of the IPG's, it does not make sense and the guide sequence and pacing does not correlate with how the kids would learn that skill" (O: 22). A teacher who uses the argument that her professional knowledge of how children learn usurps a mandated curriculum document shows evidence of the professionalism expected of teachers in the democratic public school.

*The Critic Identity*

The critic identity action plan allows teachers to construct autonomy through a process of critical inquiry into practice, and subsequent decision-making based on the outcome of their inquiry. As a ruler role identity, the teacher using the critic action plan takes confident, autonomous action based on a belief of personal authority over the classroom and in her responsibility to be knowledgeable about practices, policies and pedagogies. Teachers who used the critic identity in the study receive role support from the organizational tenets communicated in the interactions between stakeholders of democratically structured schools. Democratic practices, such as shared decision making, require that teachers are critical, knowledgeable and thoughtful regarding the decisions that affect their classroom. Similar to the activist identity, the critic uses the questioning strategy, but does so as a process of personal critical inquiry. The critic does not take the activist stance of public advocacy for her position and does not seek out opportunity to stand up and speak out. However, if probed, the critic has strong opinions, and a well-defined position, and will readily tell others what it is, if asked, but she does not fight for her position to be the right one. However, unlike the pacifist identity, the critic will not completely avoid confrontation. Instead, the teacher operating from the critic stance is concerned with personal critical inquiry into processes, pedagogies and policies and is knowledgeable about alternate means for achieving the same end, especially where school reform initiatives impose on her teaching autonomy. The main strategy used by the critic for gaining teaching autonomy is critical inquiry, and she will rationalize her autonomous action using her years of experience and subsequent knowledge of many research-based best practices as justification for doing so. In terms of

affecting organizational change, the critic role facilitates a teacher's use of questioning and inquiry to foster reflection regarding educational processes and practices.

The critic identity first surfaced in the transcript data of teachers with some years of teaching experience that have "seen it all before". Years of experience in public education are a characteristic of the teacher who uses this identity because firsthand knowledge of many reform initiatives has given the teacher direct experience with the pendulum swing phenomenon. "Sometimes, reforms are adopted just for show, and the pendulum swings back and forth, for example whole language and the phonics movement. It goes back and forth, and if you stay around long enough everything changes" (O: 24). Teachers use this identity to construct teaching autonomy when they have personally seen various initiatives mandates and reforms come and go.

> Sometimes you'll see, especially with book studies, well that's Jane Doe's idea of what this (reform) should look like. And she's made a lot of money on her book, and selling her system to this person and that person, and this district and whatever, but you look over here at John Smith and he has an equally good method or idea, but it's different. Somebody, or some people just decided let's try this reform and let's go with it. Not that it's a bad idea, but not that this other idea will work equally well. It's just kind of like, one-size fits all and sometimes it's not a one size fits all District, school or classroom" (O: 24).

By questioning processes in this manner, teachers engage in the reflective practice of critical inquiry, a necessary skill for building professional knowledge and developing personal practice. The questioning strategy used in this identity serves to help teachers

define for themselves an understanding of the variety of ways to deliver instruction that will impact student achievement. Instead of blindly adopting a reform wholesale, no questions asked, a teacher who gains teaching autonomy through the critic identity begins to articulate a theory of her own practice. It is through this process of inquiry into practice and pedagogy the teacher begins to know better than external authorities how to achieve results and she begins to trust in her decision-making ability.

> One year, I remember, we were supposed to be teaching multiplication facts to first graders. Well, of course it's just rote learning – one times one is one, one times two is two. But what good did that really do? And that took away time that we should have been focusing on something else, so I kind of feel like I have a good handle on what works and what doesn't, and what is an "in-thing" that might be a fad that might go out, and what you've seen come around so many times that you think, yeah there's something to that. (O: 24).

In this identity, the questioning strategy is a private exercise that the critic engages in with herself or with a few trusted colleagues; therefore, the critic identity carries less risk than the activist identity. Through this type of questioning and critical inquiry, the teacher may exercise teaching autonomy by quietly discarding a practice that is not developmentally appropriate for her students, as in teaching first graders rote multiplication facts, or having kindergarten students write a letter home when they misbehave (O: 24, P: 44). When the critic gains teaching autonomy by discarding practices that are mandated, yet developmentally inappropriate, children benefit. Stakeholders in the public school system both expect the professional educator to be able

to critique reforms, mandates and initiatives, as well as blindly follow them. Critical questioning allows teachers to test and check hypotheses they have formed about what works best for students. The critic identity is associated with the professional identity because knowledge of best practices justifies taking autonomous action; especially if it is based on what the teacher believes is "best for her kids", a belief expressed by all ten participants.

As with the activist identity, teachers performing the critic action plan refer to external authority as "they". Critics often do not see themselves in collaborative arrangements with outside authorities. "They" can refer to the principal, central office administrators, state education agency monitors, or any of a number of entities that impose on the teaching autonomy of the educator. A Palomares teacher performing the critic role identity was not afraid to speak about a practice that she felt showed loss of respect for the teacher. Learning walks are conducted by external authority figures that come into the teacher's classroom with a specific agenda to monitor implementation of district, state and federal initiatives. In this case "they" were looking for a card that is supposed to be displayed on any bulletin board of student work in the district's schools. The descriptive card is supposed to show the TEKS that were covered in the activity and the criteria used for grading and displaying the work.

> They just come inside the classroom and never ask you anything. They don't ask you anything; they just come in and see. They were looking at that wall (points to the wall with the student work) and they left, and then they came back and they asked me, 'Do you have a card to (explain) your bulletin board'? And I said, 'Yes, it's behind the TV. It's on the bottom,

but it's behind the TV.' See, those things happen all the time, and this time they came back to ask me, but what if they don't come back? Usually they don't come back. They just leave and assume that I don't have the card. I think that attitude shows a loss of respect for us as teachers. If you need to find out why did I put that over there? Ask me, and I'll tell you. Sometimes they don't know what's going on, but that's the way they work (P: 43).

One purpose of the critic identity action plan is oversight, intended to limit the negative influence of external authority by identifying specific practices, which are inappropriate, and if implemented as intended impede teaching autonomy. In this case the Palomares teacher is critical of a practice of having outsiders come into the classroom to act as judge over whether the teacher is in compliance with a specific initiative. In this case, the teacher is expected to comply with the Principles of Learning initiative to make visible "clear expectations" regarding how student work is selected for display. The teacher sees the monitors' actions as a direct affront to her authority over her classroom arrangement showing disrespect for her decision-making ability as a professional educator. Likewise, when a policy to reduce the number of special education referrals in the district put new procedures into place for referring a child for testing, specifically requiring teachers to document intervention strategies over a period of six weeks before referring for testing, teachers were critical of the reduction in authority to have input into the decision.

I would say, in some areas I have a lot of input, as far as what to teach, the intervention steps for them. I think it's completely on my plate. When I

> do decide, say that a child needs to be tested for special ed, then I think I have very little input other than to tell them, and then I feel there is so much red-tape, and you're questioned so much, that in the end you really have very little input, if it's your lucky day, your child gets tested (P: 39).

The teacher speaks from the critic identity action plan when she identifies practices that remove her authority to have key input into processes for which her professional, firsthand information about a student's need for intervention is ignored. A special education teacher at Overton illustrated use of the critic identity regarding the same issue of referring students for special education testing.

> We have typically been a campus that if the kids aren't right on grade level, then that's a real easy referral (for special education testing). Well, you know, they need to have a chance because sometimes, especially in math, resource is not the best thing if they're just a little below grade level. Sometimes that (placement in special education) can cause a child to go down. Math is hard when you have multiple level kids in math, and as long as they can stay in the general education classroom for math, I mean that's where we want them to be. So, getting all of that paper work together…I know it's a real pain, but the process now is going to make the teachers more accountable for doing those interventions and not just a quick fix (O: 21).

In this case, the critic stance is used to question a previous practice on her campus of easily identifying students a little below grade level for special education resource placement. The previous practice was shown to have over-identified students for special

education services and contributed to their lack of progress through placement in a less rigorous resource classroom setting. Opposite the viewpoint of the Palomares teacher (P: 39), the Overton teacher, (O: 21) believes that teachers need to identify and be held accountable for implementing specific practices that will be used to intervene in the case of a student who is under performing in their classrooms before referral for testing. The Palomares teacher, on the other hand, argues that she has already intervened on the child's behalf and would not make a referral for special education testing without such evidence. She sees the district policy as "so much red tape" preventing a student from receiving services she believes he would benefit from (P: 39). Though the outcome of the Palomares teacher's use of the critic identity is different from the outcome of the Overton teacher's, the purpose of performing the critic stance in both cases is to question, critique and influence policy and decision making that affects their classroom and students.

Another oversight function of the teacher's use of the critic identity was to minimize the imposition from external authority over the use of her time. Issues of time, which were commonly discussed among all ten teachers in the study and by those who perform the critic identity, are used as a reason for justifying teaching autonomy. "How do you accommodate this new policy, in this subject area, if there is not enough time in the day to do it?" (P: 43). Mandates and reform initiatives impose time constraints on classroom teachers and often create conflict that leads the critic to question the viability of the implementation as it was written. When teachers assert authority over their classrooms using the critic action plan, a common purpose is to gain time or to promote the wise use of time.

> I try to look at the big picture, having been teaching for 21 years, and knowing exactly what skill the child really needs to come away with, if there's a different way of teaching it, or if I feel like there's too much repetition – lesson one, lesson two, lesson three, and lesson four are all really over the same skill, and it's a skill that my group of students seems to have mastered, well then, I'm certainly not going to teach everything in lesson one, two, three, and four. I'm going to compact it and we're moving on (O: 24).

When teachers are able to justify disregarding the suggested pacing in a mandated curriculum document and take autonomous action based on professional knowledge, as in curriculum compacting described above, they begin to 'craft autonomy' over time, as one teacher described.

> We may throw out some ideas, like I'm thinking of using technology in this way to try to get something across, or I'm going to use certain books or visuals…so, we may throw out different tools or resources that we use, but the exact methods by which we teach it…I think that a teacher has to craft those as they grow themselves as a teacher and realize how they're most effective in teaching. So, I feel like I have a lot of autonomy in that sense (O: 16).

Role support for the critic identity comes from the individual teacher and trusted others who share, and thereby legitimate her view. Teachers use the critic identity to construct teaching autonomy in situations where they do not fear reprisal from the external authority. Unlike the activist stance, which carries the risk of publicly challenging

external authority, teachers who perform the critic identity do not seek out opportunity to publicly sway everyone to their viewpoint. The teacher using the critic identity is content to quietly go about the business of teaching using her professional knowledge as a guide for practice. The critic role relates to the professional identity in that the teacher's strategy of critical inquiry into practice combined with reflection on, and knowledge of best practices is used as the primary justification for taking autonomous action.

*The Specialist Identity*

Teachers who perceive themselves outside of the impositions to teaching autonomy that other teachers in the profession must endure are most likely to perform the ruler role identity of the specialist. Specialty teachers in this study taught kindergarten, first grade, special education, art, or bilingual programs at non-tested grade levels, and therefore, perceived more leeway to ignore the impositions to teaching autonomy that plague a regular, tested, grade level, classroom teacher. For instance, one of the specialty teachers in the study had no direct responsibility for teaching core content curriculum standards tested on the state assessment (P: 35). Others were responsible for core content, but did not teach at a grade level for which students are tested on the state assessments used for NCLB accountability (O: 16, O: 17, O: 22, P: 43, P: 44, P: 48). The specialist identity allows some teachers to distance themselves from these external sources of control, and they enact a script that claims they are unscathed by the pressures their counterparts face at the tested grade levels. Specialist teachers claim to have teaching autonomy in spite of external impositions, for instance, accountability to NCLB policies.

> NCLB accountability has not affected me, but then again, I teach first grade, and I have been teaching first grade for 11 years and it is hard for me to step out of that role and put myself in a situation where I would feel that pressure…I would feel like I was teaching for the test. Frankly, I feel it would not be a positive thing for me, to feel the pressure of teaching to the test. If I taught in a testing grade level, I think I would feel that pressure just because I want to do well (O: 16).

Others who confer expert status to the specialty fields within education legitimate the specialist's position and action plan. Specialists are expected to act in such a way that they confirm expert knowledge through role performance. When teachers perform the ruler role action plan of the specialist, they receive role support from others through this tacit understanding of special position and knowledge. Role support confirms their expert, or exclusionary status and the expectation is communicated that these special teachers can reject outside impositions to their teaching autonomy. One example of an imposition to teaching autonomy frequently mentioned by teachers in the study was the instructional planning guides. The IPG's either don't exist for specialty teachers (P: 35) or they can be ignored, in deference to the teacher's professional judgment regarding the special field of knowledge required of their position (O: 21).

> In my area of art, I feel like I have autonomy, because I am a special area teacher, not a classroom teacher where they have to go by certain guidelines. We do have a framework, but for us, I do not think art teachers have to select everything like everybody else in all the other

> elementary schools. I think I have autonomy, in that respect, where I can choose, and pick, and jump around in the curriculum (P: 35).

In a similar vein, this quote by a special education teacher illustrates the perception of freedom and control this identity is able to espouse regarding their ability to make important classroom decisions regarding content and pacing.

> As a special education teacher, I'm not necessarily driven by the IPG's. The District and what they are going towards drive my autonomy, but more so the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the student's needs drive my autonomy. I am the one making the decisions on what to teach to those children based on their needs. I do have the ability and the freedom to make decisions about my teaching (O 21).

Like the professional identity, the specialist uses the strategy of *acting professionally* from a stance of "knowing better" but it is not wholly the teacher's direct actions that construct her teaching autonomy. Rather, teaching autonomy is conferred upon the teacher through professional expectations for the position itself communicated through role support. This type of conferred teaching autonomy is closely associated with traditional views of teacher professionalism, the idea that autonomy is granted by the licensing and credentialing process similar to other professions like doctor and lawyer. Through role support, others confer authority to the teacher, which creates conditions that make it easier for the specialist teacher to perceive high teaching autonomy on the TAS (O: 17, O: 21, P: 35). However, teachers who perceived low teaching autonomy on the TAS (O: 16, P: 43, P: 44, P: 48) also described situations where their special position gave them the liberty to make instructional and pacing decisions based on professional

judgment, as in this teacher discussing her bilingual first grade classroom. "I meet the needs of my students, so I have to modify my way of teaching according to their specific needs. I feel like I have the freedom to make arrangements to accommodate my student's needs first, even if it's not in the book (P: 43).

Likewise, teachers at Overton, in general, perceive they have more teaching autonomy than most teachers in the district because of their students' high performance on the state assessment, which results in less outside monitoring of teacher performance. The Overton teachers use the specialist identity and action plan when they express the belief that they have teaching autonomy simply by virtue of their assignment to a high performing campus. The Overton teachers receive role support for this perception when they acknowledge the confirmation they receive from others who are more likely to leave the staff at Overton alone to make important decisions regarding their classrooms. The specialist identity action plan allows teachers at Overton to more easily ignore mandates, reforms and initiatives from a stance of holding a better teaching position than most in the district. "I do think if I were at several other campuses that I can think of, I would probably be under fire for not following this policy to the letter and not doing this mandate**.** I have heard horror stories from other teachers of being told explicitly step by step what to do" (O: 24). The specialist identity allows Overton teachers to operate in isolation, in some ways cut off from the impositions to teaching autonomy that many of their counterparts face on a daily basis. "Pretty much we are left alone here. I don't think anyone feels like they can do whatever they want, but I think that we have more autonomy than other schools" (O: 21). In this way, the specialist identity is related to the pacifist identity in that isolation is a key feature. However, the difference lies in that

others isolate the specialist identity through role support and conferring the expectation of exclusion, and the pacifist isolates herself from others with a hope of going undiscovered in her noncompliance with impositions to her teaching autonomy.

Like the professional identity, the specialist identity acts from a stance of knowing better than an external authority regarding important classroom decisions. Since teachers who use the strategy of acting professionally from a stance of knowing better are often seen by others, or see themselves, as experts or specialists in their field, they receive increased status. A reciprocal relationship exists between the conferred status given specialty positions in education and the teacher's use of the identity to construct teaching autonomy. The increase in professional status garnered by teachers in specialty positions allows teachers to use the action plan as a strategy for asserting authority in the workplace.

Another way teachers use the specialist identity to gain teaching autonomy is by gaining special professional knowledge that allows them to advocate for a position, method or belief. This specialized training contributes to their professional knowledge and comes from a variety of sources, which include professional development activities, such as book studies; university level coursework; training for specialized credentials; and campus or district in-service trainings. Through role support, others confer status to teachers who have completed specialized trainings and performing the specialist identity is understood to be part of being an 'effective teacher', able to make decisions based, not only on the needs of her students, but also on the foundation of knowledge gained through continued professional development. Through this process of professional growth and knowledge gained over years of experience, a teacher develops the ability to

assert authority over her professional life as teacher without fear of challenge to her authority. “Because I know what I do, and I feel like I have an understanding of what I do… if someone came and said, you’re going to have to prove to me that you did 90-minutes of language arts, I could, because everything is interdisciplinary” (O: 17). The specialist identity confirms, for some teachers, both specialized knowledge and a level of confidence necessary to make and justify important decisions regarding their classrooms. This aspect of the identity places it as the dialectical opposite of the ruler role novice identity, which defers important decisions to external authorities they perceive have more knowledge and experience. In this study, a second-year teacher at Palomares in a bilingual kindergarten classroom described the action plan of the specialist for constructing her teaching autonomy by “tweaking” the scripted Reading First program to meet the needs of her bilingual students.

> We have Scott’s Foresman Language Arts, so in terms of the language arts there’s a script that we have to follow as closely as we can, but then again it’s up to us to teach it because if I’m following a script and I’m not reaching my students then I need to be able to tweak that. Like I said, I’m the inclusion teacher, so I feel here our principal really allows us to be able to do that, to meet the needs of the students, because after all that’s why we’re here…we’re here to meet the needs of the students (P: 48).

Interestingly, this Palomares teacher also uses the ruled role novice identity of espousing the belief that experts should be making the decisions about content, pacing and instruction when she described how she selected the learning activities for her classroom. “There are things that you have to follow like the TEKS, and then the IPG’s help you

guide your instruction (P: 48). This is an example of the way one teacher in the study shifted between two very different positions, specialist and novice, when describing her actions, beliefs, and assumptions about her ability to make the decisions that yield teaching autonomy.

## Assertive Stances of Teaching Autonomy

Teaching autonomy achieved through use of the four ruler identities of activist, critic, professional, and specialist serve the purpose of reinforcing a teacher's credibility with peers, parents, administrators, and community members and demonstrates the primary purpose for using the strategies in the action plans. Democratic governance structures in public schools have supported teachers performing the ruler role identities when they are expected to bring knowledge and professionalism to the decision-making activities required of public school educators. The four ruler identities and action plans described by teachers in the study identify ways they are able to actively assert authority over important classroom decisions and thereby construct teaching autonomy. However, teachers must also work in a bureaucratic governance structure where they are expected to comply with various externally made decisions. These mandates, required state and district curriculum, school reform initiatives and other policies impose on a teacher's ability to make some decisions for her classroom. In the next section, the teachers in the study described actions and stances they took to passively assert authority and claim some teaching autonomy while still operating within the bureaucratic governance structures of public schools where they are expected to comply with external authority.

*Ruled Roles: Passively Asserting Authority and Constructing Teaching Autonomy*

Teachers in the study described actions for passively asserting authority over their classroom domain, despite impositions from external authority. The action plans of the pacifist, novice, supporter and follower, describe how teachers are able to construct their teaching autonomy within the bureaucratic governance structure of the public school. Within the four ruled identities, the primary strategies for gaining teaching autonomy are withdrawing from conflict and biding time, conferring authority to others, collaborative decision-making and complying with directives. Ruled role identities are adopted by teachers under different circumstances and with different outcomes, but always with a goal to take a path of least conflict to exerting authority over their classrooms. The ruled teacher acts from a position of passive opposition, deference to authority, belief in democratic governance structures and shared decision making, or belief in bureaucratic governance structures, which the teacher has no choice but to follow. The ruled role asserts, "Someone smarter than me is in charge and they are the ones making the decisions"(O: 21). Teachers' perceptions of their teaching autonomy on the TAS, whether high or low, were not predictive of use of ruled role identities. In other words, the ruled role and its four identities are not exclusively adopted by teachers with low autonomy and are just as likely to be adopted by teachers with high autonomy at both campuses. These four ruled identities show the various action plans taken when a teacher cannot have complete freedom to control the instructional decisions that affect her classroom. These identities allow the teacher to exert passive authority over the classroom, even when external controls would seem to eliminate any teaching autonomy. By switching between the two roles, ruler and ruled, and their associated identities, the

public school teacher reconciles the paradox of a profession that is unable to grant its members substantial authority and autonomy, while at the same time valuing the teachers' critical place in the decision making required and expected of a professional educator. The four identities teachers use while operating from the role of the ruled are *the pacifist*, *the novice*, *the supporter* and *the follower*. These four identities explain the paradox of how teachers are able to construct autonomy within the democratic and bureaucratic governance structures of the public school that impose on teaching autonomy.

*The Pacifist Identity*

The pacifist identity contains the action plan teachers use when they do not want to take the overt risk carried by performing the ruler role activist identity to gain teaching autonomy. As the dialectical opposite of the activist, the pacifist's main strategy is to avoid confrontation and obtain teaching autonomy by operating in isolation and sometimes secrecy of others. In addition, the pacifist wishes to appear as if they are in compliance with mandates, directives and initiatives, so as not to call attention to themselves. The pacifist identity can be apathetic to change initiatives, and often uses the time-honored technique of shutting the classroom door and doing what they want as the primary means for constructing teaching autonomy. This technique receives role support from the profession as a tool of last resort, one that is always at any teacher's disposal. In response to impositions to their teaching autonomy for which they do not wish to comply, the pacifist will present the outward appearance of compliance. The outward presentation of compliance to external sources of control places the pacifist identity in the ruled role category.

When teachers are ruled over by external authority and they believe they cannot openly fight, they will use the pacifist action plan to achieve teaching autonomy. "But as all teachers do, you say, 'yeah sure', and then you go in your classroom and close the door and do what you want to, or what you think is best" (P: 44). A teacher operating from the pacifist identity believes she is doing what is best for kids and she will use the stance of knowing better than an outside authority when making the decisions that yield teaching autonomy. The knowing better strategy is used by many identities as a justification for teaching autonomy. However, the key difference between the use of the knowing better strategy in the pacifist identity is that the knowledge used to justify teaching autonomy is not publicly shared with others from an advocacy position. The teacher using the pacifist identity action plan operates in a closed-circuit loop where isolation, secrecy and apathy regarding the success of the reform initiative create the perception of teaching autonomy. The pacifist identity receives role support from what Weick (1976) described as the "loosely coupled" environment inherent in the teaching profession that creates the ability for the teacher to simply ignore impositions to teaching autonomy by shutting the classroom door.

Furthermore, the teacher using the pacifist stance does not engage in reflective activities with trusted colleagues, as does the teacher using the critic identity action plan to construct teaching autonomy. Instead, the pacifist wishes to be left alone and retains a traditional view of teaching as a competitive and individual endeavor where it is every man for himself. Teachers who gain teaching autonomy from the pacifist's stance do not operate from a collaborative standpoint required of democratic governance structures.

> I would not say that standards for classroom behavior were set, so much. We have the new Pride Team and they have just set the common area rules, or expectations/guidelines, and they tried to move the Pride Teams to the classrooms, but in my opinion it is every teacher and their own strategy, their own expectations for their classroom (P: 39).

The idea that teachers operate from an isolated position of 'every man for himself' is a key belief of a teacher taking the pacifist stance.

> So, there are rules for the cafeteria, rules for walking in the hallway, rules for going to dismissal, rules for the playground, things like that, and those are rules that I'm happy to follow, they're good rules. Most people on campus, almost everybody follows them or tries to, but the ones within your class…that's when you start dealing with personalities and parental issues and things like that, those I need to decide (P: 44).

Like the activist stance, the pacifist stance also is opposed to impositions to teaching autonomy that come from external sources, and often refer to others as "they". By distancing themselves from external sources of authority, the pacifist is able to disregard directives, mandates and reform initiatives without needing to make a public display about their opposing viewpoints. "They ask me to do certain things and you think, that can't happen in my classroom, it's not going to work, then you just don't do it…you don't worry about it" (P: 44). By operating in this manner, teachers gain teaching autonomy without having to confront anyone about their practices. Because of this nonconfrontational nature, the pacifist identity action plan carries minimal risk for teachers as a method for achieving teaching autonomy.

From an organizational standpoint, the pacifist identity action plan is probably the most difficult to anticipate and address when seeking to implement top-down reforms, mandates and initiatives. Teachers operating from the pacifist identity also have the potential to act as quiet saboteur to change initiatives for which they disagree and do not comply because it is likely that others in the organization are unaware of the noncompliance. The teacher using the pacifist identity to achieve teaching autonomy does not wish to call attention to the fact that she is ignoring some mandates in favor of what she knows is best. Teachers using the pacifist identity operate in secrecy, wanting others to believe that they are in compliance with mandates.

> I would say district mandates, school mandates, things that pretty much annoy you, and the fact that you have to do it. I try not to bring that in to my classroom. Of course, I'm angry for a while, but then I just have to let it go because that's not the big picture. I would say the needs of my students guide what I do, and the time that I need to put into teaching, what I need to re-teach…all of that is guided by their (my students') interests and their learning (P: 39).

In this case, the teacher describes district and school mandates as annoyances that make her angry and she is able to disregard them in favor of meeting the needs of her students. The teacher does not share the stance with the activist identity of overt action advocating for change, rather the pacifist sees the imposition to her autonomy as something to "let go" of by not bringing the annoyance into her classroom. For teachers using the pacifist identity, autonomous action is justified on the basis of letting students' needs be a guide to her decision-making, a strategy previously identified as "knowing better" than an

outside authority. The difference in the pacifist's use of the knowing better strategy is that the knowledge is something she keeps to herself.

Another strategy employed by the teacher using the pacifist identity to construct teaching autonomy is that of quietly biding time while the mandate, initiative or policy is rejected in favor of something new. Teachers with years of experience and professional knowledge about teaching are more likely to adopt the pacifist identity to construct teaching autonomy. This is because, like the critic identity, they have experienced the pendulum swing phenomenon of school reform and have waited out impositions to their teaching autonomy before. Unlike the critic identity, which serves an oversight function, and provides the teacher with a forum for critical inquiry into practices, the pacifist identity is content to quietly bide time, working in isolation from peers and hoping the reform will eventually pass out of favor.

A typical use of the pacifist identity action plan by teachers in the study was seen in response to the expected use of the mandated curriculum document, the Instructional Planning Guides. Teachers at both sites readily ignored the mandated document, calling it a guide, and pointing out the flaws that allowed them to rationalize their noncompliance with the expectation that they would follow the document as written. "If I spent the amount of time needed to prepare that lesson that they're saying to, it would take me eight hours to prepare a 15-minute lesson, and that's not realistic either" (O: 24). Instead of openly fighting over the unreasonableness of the IPG's, the teacher simply ignores them and does what she knows is best.

One outcome of teachers using the pacifist identity action plan is the behavior contributes to the piecemeal implementation of mandated reforms, initiatives, and

policies on school campuses. The teacher who uses the pacifist identity to construct teaching autonomy is not likely to express a high level of trust for the decision-making of external authorities and does not contribute to the idea of schools as professional learning communities (DuFour, 2006). The pacifist identity action plan requires that teachers appear to be in compliance or agreement with policies, initiatives, or mandates while in actual practice they are not.

*The Novice Identity*

Teachers who believe they lack either the experience or expert knowledge to make important decisions regarding their classrooms perform the novice identity action plan. Though novice teachers are identified in the literature as those with less than one year of experience, the novice identity action plan is not confined to teachers in their first year of teaching. Teachers in the study who described the act of deferring their authority to external sources of control had varying years of experience, but all had less than five (P: 43, P: 44, P: 48). The novice identity action plan is related to the teacher's belief that external sources of control are better able to make the decisions regarding content, pacing, and programming for which they perceive a personal lack of expert knowledge or experience in decision making of this nature. In terms of teaching autonomy, the teacher operating from the position of the novice identity expresses trust for external authorities that make decisions about pacing, curriculum and school reform programs. The novice both seeks out and expects guidance from others to make the instructional decisions that yield teaching autonomy. "The TEA guidelines, the curriculum for that particular area, and also the time we can spend on a subject are needed for teachers" (P: 43). Unlike the professional identity who professes to know better than external authority regarding

decisions that affect her classroom, the novice engages in the act of deferring personal authority to those who "know better than me" (P: 43, P: 48). Teachers in the study use the novice action plan to explain why their teaching autonomy is limited to the decisions they are able to make only after the decisions made by others are followed.

Of the five teachers who rated their autonomy low, three were teachers with less than four years of classroom experience and all taught at Palomares Elementary. None of the five teachers who perceived high autonomy in the study were teachers with less than four years of classroom experience. This indicates that deferring decision making to others who are more knowledgeable due to lack of experience is a component of a perception of low autonomy. This data supports earlier research indicating that the least experienced teachers are selected to work with students of color, poverty and language difference, since all three inexperienced teachers were assigned to Palomares, the Title I school. In the study, the three Palomares teachers who readily deferred to experts using the novice identity expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to make decisions, or inexperience in the wide variety of decision-making in which professional teachers are expected to engage. This attitude receives role support when novice teachers find themselves assigned to a Title I campus involved in various mandated school reform initiatives and accountability measures for compliance. These inexperienced teachers in the study articulated a sincere belief that new teachers should be told what to teach and be given explicit guidelines to follow. This belief in the superiority of external authorities to make important decisions for teachers is at the heart of the action plan, which assumes teachers should defer decision-making to others more knowledgeable. By giving up this

important responsibility, a teacher using this identity makes the claim that others in charge should be responsible for deciding what to teach and when to teach it.

> I think we should have some kind of autonomy, but also some guidelines because, if not, I would be teaching math at the high school level if I don't really know what the curriculum is, or where are my limitations. So, we have to have some kind of curriculum to follow, and decisions of what to teach so you can really stay within the grade level that you are teaching (P: 43).

In this case the teacher allows that she needs "some kind of autonomy" but that she also expects to be given some parameters as to what to teach, or be left to make erroneous instructional decisions like teaching high school level math to her first grade students. The claim here is that external authorities help inexperienced teachers avoid making such an egregious mistake. Teachers operating from the novice identity also look toward more experienced colleagues for help in decision making required of the classroom teacher. The novice action plan allows for passive acts of decision making, those that are made after the state has selected the content and skills, the district has decided the pacing and selection of content by grading period, and the more experienced teachers on the team have suggested learning activities that would teach the objectives and content required by district and state. It is only after all other entities that impose on the teaching autonomy of the teacher are satisfied that the novice identity will consider making a decision that follows her own ideas.

> We plan together as a team, so the first thing we have to look at is the TEKS, what's the skill? Then we look at the IPGs, or to teachers who

> have been here more than five years, some of the other teachers have been here ten years, seven years, six years, and they give us ideas of how they're going to teach and so forth. As newer teachers, we can either choose to follow their ideas, or we have ideas of our own, from whatever other workshops (P: 48).

The ruled role novice identity is the dialectical opposite of the ruler role professional and specialist identities. Instead of gaining teaching autonomy from a stance of knowing better than external authority, the novice readily gives up teaching autonomy by acknowledging that external authorities should select content and determine the pacing of lessons, and structure the time requirements of the school day. The novice teachers in the study rely on the Instructional Planning Guides (IPG's) for guidance regarding content and pacing. New teachers find the guides are helpful. Teachers performing the novice identity from Palomares suggested that least experienced teachers may want to be told what to do and need help with pacing, so they may find mandated curriculum helpful. "We have our state standards, the TEKS, and so we teach with a purpose, and I like that. I like that in the IPG's we have sample lessons, and that's very good for first year teachers…"(P: 48). In the novice identity action plan, teaching autonomy has its limits, with decision-making allowed only within the framework of the state and district mandated curriculum. All those who exert external influences over the inexperienced teachers' classrooms reinforce the role support for the novice position. This finding suggests that when teachers enter the profession, they are expected to accept impositions to their teaching autonomy without question. This is a necessary quality to develop in

teachers who work in a bureaucratically run public school environment, which requires adherence to top down decisions.

Using the novice identity action plan, teachers primarily construct teaching autonomy for themselves by carving out time after they have completed the requirements provided by external authorities, suggesting that teaching autonomy is achieved only when all others entities have been satisfied.

> We have to follow certain guidelines. This is what you need to do, and this is the way you're suppose to be doing it, and this is the amount of time you have to accomplish these goals. So, really, it's that we don't have much say in that, we have just to follow on this. But even with that, if you have the time and you fulfill what they need, and you have extra time, then that is when you get to put more of yourself into it (P: 43).

Teachers who described the novice identity action plan assumed that personal lack of experience and expert knowledge requires that they be told what to do in the classroom. The novice understands the idea that classroom decisions should be based on what is best for students (a belief expressed by all ten teachers in the study); however the novice trusts external authorities to have tested and proven programs, mandates and school reform initiatives prior to implementation to determine their effectiveness in helping students. Because of this, the teachers who take the position of the novice rationalize giving up teaching autonomy to those who are more knowledgeable.

> They are the experts. I mean, they are supposed to be the experts. I'm just here for the kids. If they say, we're going to try this because it will

help the kids, hey I'm willing to go for it, if it is going to benefit my students (P: 43).

Performing the novice identity allows teachers to be less concerned with individual teaching autonomy in favor of having important classroom decisions made by others identified as the experts they are not.

*The Supporter Identity*

Teachers who perform the supporter identity operate from a stance of positive, collaborative agreement and trust for the external authorities that are making classroom decisions, which directly affect teaching autonomy. Teachers who are in agreement with the latest policy, school reform initiative, or mandate perform the supporter identity action plan. The action plan is characterized by behaviors that indicate compliance and adherence to the tenets of a given imposition to her teaching autonomy. Because of this stance, the teacher using the supporter identity embraces what another teacher may see as an imposition to her teaching autonomy.

The supporter, novice and follower identities all share a similar belief that external authorities are better able to make important decisions regarding school reform initiatives and decisions, such as determining the content standards and skills for each grade level. However, the teachers who view teaching autonomy from the position of the supporter identity have enough teaching experience and knowledge to believe they would have made the same instructional decisions as the outside authority given the same situation. This is a subtle and key difference between the underlying beliefs of the supporter, the novice and the follower identities. Therefore, the supporter identity action plan carries the assumption that externally made decisions concerning content, pacing,

organization and sequencing of skills and knowledge is aligned with what the teacher would have selected on her own. The teacher operates from a position of deferring personal authority over classroom decisions to external sources of control due to positive past experiences as described by an Overton teacher who rated her autonomy high on the TAS.

> I'm pretty open to mandates, and I always like to think of it as, what is good about it, what is bad about it? If there is nothing we can do about it, there is nothing we can do about it. I do not want to live my life, at home or at school, fretting over something that you do not have any control of. I think it would just depend. The Dyslexia Bundle, for example, is a good thing for kids, but if it was something that was a bad thing, then I might have another route, or another way of feeling. Usually, I try to see that there are things that happen and people sometimes make decisions that are smarter than me and that it may not be a good idea at the beginning and you know, being with the other principal for all these years, and us being with her for all those years, we had a lot of that. My husband used to laugh at something that she would mandate that we do and we would wonder, what is she thinking? And then, lo' and behold, she had a master plan and in the long run it turned out to be a good thing (O: 21).

Teachers who perform the action plan of the supporter have some history and experience to draw from in which they have personally experienced impositions to their teaching autonomy that they may not have supported initially. When teachers experience mandates, reform initiatives, or policies that turn out to be "good for kids", they begin to

establish trust for the decision making of external authorities. From this perspective, a mandate or reform initiative is more likely to be perceived positively and implemented as planned. Teachers in the study were able to describe various initiatives that have positively influenced their teaching practice. One such initiative was implemented in the school district in 1999, when the new superintendent brought forth The Principles of Learning from the University of Pittsburgh (Resnick, 1997). An Overton teacher illustrates the process by which she went from performing the critic identity action plan to the supporter action plan with the Principles of Learning reform initiative.

> The Principles of Learning initiative, was and still is something that I feel like I follow, and I do think it influences my teaching. At first, I thought it wasn't a good idea, and that's because I had a misunderstanding of it. I thought, this is not applicable to younger students, but it was not until I thought about it and used it more and realized, hey this could actually be very powerful when it is tailored to meet the needs of these young students. Again, if you are careful and thoughtful about it, I think the Principles of Learning initiative is good. So, that has definitely influenced my teaching. It has turned from a thing that I did not support fully, to now I think it is important and I see the value in it (O: 16).

For this teacher, a mismatch between her initial understanding of the Principles of Learning initiative and her realization that the reform could be used with first grade students in a "powerful" way lead to a change in her practice. When the implementation of a reform initiative causes a teacher to change her practice, it has also altered her decision-making regarding her classroom and, therefore, her teaching autonomy.

Because the teacher now supports the initiative, she makes decisions that support the tenets of the externally imposed program. The teacher is likely to develop trust for the future decisions of external authorities to be aligned with her beliefs about policy and practice, and the teacher may develop an attitude of "being open to mandates" (O: 21). Teaching autonomy for the teacher operating from the supporter stance is, therefore, constructed through the act of decision-making that mirrors and supports what has been previously decided by external authority and imposed.

The supporter identity serves an important function of balancing individual teaching autonomy with collective teaching autonomy required for consistent implementation of school reform initiatives, policies and mandates. The supporter identity action plan serves the goals of democratic governance structures in public schools, which demand a collaborative decision making environment. Prior research shows that school reform initiatives, mandates and policies are more likely to be implemented as planned if teachers have been included in and feel a part of the decision-making process (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1997; McNeil, 1988; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Teachers who believe they are contributing members of the decision-making bodies of schools perform the supporter identity. The supporter identity is dialectically opposite the activist identity, in that the primary purpose of performing the supporter action plan is communicating to others that an externally made decision is the right one for the campus and classroom. Therefore, teachers who perform the supporter identity are critical to the success of school wide reform initiatives.

When teachers perform the action plan of the supporter identity, individual authority is aligned with external authority regarding important classroom decisions.

When individual and external authorities combine through this alignment, the concept of collaborative authority is achieved in the school community. The teacher performing the supporter identity allows for a democratic school culture to develop through the process of shared decision-making around common school goals. Even teachers with perceived high autonomy are willing to give up personal authority in exchange for saving time planning together for instruction and assessment of their students (O: 22, O: 17). In addition, teachers with high autonomy will defer authority to those they perceive as an expert or more knowledgeable in the field-- "someone smarter than me" (O: 21). The supporter acknowledges and begins to trust that there are experts who have more information regarding policies, initiatives and mandates and if the teacher's beliefs and knowledge of best practices happens to align, they are able to perform the supporter action plan.

Teachers at both campuses who perform the role of supporter find shared decision making to positively influence their autonomy by allowing for discussion and reflection of ideas that utilize the dialogue of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2006). Teachers described engaging in dialogue at team meetings to decide how they would assess student work and make other critical decisions regarding the classroom and their students.

> An example of an initiative that is being brought down right now at our team meetings is the idea of moving towards professional learning communities… right now, we are taking specific math concepts and discussing, what do we want to teach? How do we want to teach it? What kind of assessment are we going to do to make sure the kids got there?

> And, that is where the team meetings are hopefully to move for the whole school. So, we are moving towards the team meetings being more about asking guiding questions about teaching and learning: What are you doing? What kinds of assessments are you going to do? What kinds of learning opportunities are you going to provide? (O: 22).

The implementation of professional learning communities as an organizational structure for schools in the district is an example of a top-down initiative imposed on teachers in the study. For the Overton teacher, she sees herself embracing the idea of discussing teaching and learning in a team meeting focused on student work and dialogue about practice. The teacher is engaged in the collaborative act of making important decisions within the structure and guidance of an externally imposed framework.

> Yes, the team meetings do affect my curricular autonomy, because now I am focusing more on those aspects chosen as the team focus and what we are doing with numerical fluencies is now taking up a third of my math time, whereas before we were geared more toward the Investigations. Now we are splitting up our time to focus on more areas during math time. So, that has definitely influenced my curricular autonomy a lot, but it is a good thing, it is a real good thing (O: 22).

Overton teachers who perform the action plan of the supporter identity express positive statements regarding outside influences to their autonomy. This positive stance allows the teacher to approach the influence to her time and restructuring of the curriculum as an opportunity to fine tune the curriculum to focus on what students need. The implementation of the professional learning communities model created an opportunity

for focused discussion with colleagues regarding student achievement. Teachers who reflect on their teaching practices with colleagues build the professional knowledge necessary to make confident decisions regarding pacing, and content that best meet their students' needs.

However, at Palomares, collaborative authority can have the effect of homogenizing classrooms, so that group decision making is reduced to deciding what words everyone will have in common on their vocabulary walls for the outsiders to see when they come by to check. (P: 43, P: 48). Palomares teachers had the added stress of being identified by the district as a Focus School, a school that is to be the focus of attention and intervention by outside authority due to poor performance by students on the state assessments. The supporter identity action plan allows the teacher to believe that by working together the teachers can figure out how to get out of being under the gaze of external authority. A Palomares teacher identifies teamwork and communication with each other in the form of reminders as two strategies used to make sure they are all in compliance with what the outside monitors want to see on their visits to the campus.

> It is very stressful. Being a Focus School is probably not something that anybody wants to be, but I think here at our school we've said, okay this is what's going on and the only thing that's going to get us out of that is if we work hard and if we try to figure out together what it is that we need to work on. So, we have our faculty meetings, we have our professional development. Our team, we're very good about communicating. We remind each other, you know, did you get the vocabulary out? We give each other reminders, have you had time, because one of the things that

> they like to see is – whoever they is – is common student work and all the vocabulary the same on the word walls. So, we just try to help each other. At least our team, we remind each other, we have an awesome team leader – she obviously takes a lot of work home. It's a lot of work. It's very stressful, yes (P: 48).

Palomares teachers differed from Overton teachers in the use of the supporter identity in that the stance taken was one of supporting each other to align student work and classroom presentation of work to the expectations of external authorities with the goal of getting out of the situation that has been created by poor performance on the state assessments. Overton teachers performed the supporter identity from a belief in alignment of their individual authority with the expectations of external authority based on experiences that have taught them to trust in the decisions external authorities have made for them in the past. Though teachers using the supporter identity action plan are in agreement with what the external authorities are imposing on the classroom, Palomares teachers were motivated to trust in the decisions of external authorities believing it will "help us get out of this situation" (P: 48).

Teachers who perform the supporter action plan claim positive feelings towards initiatives, mandates or other influences to their teaching autonomy. The supporter identity receives role support from external authorities that rely on the support of teachers to implement programs and policies as planned. As a ruled role identity, the supporter constructs teaching autonomy within an externally imposed framework bringing forth a positive stance that builds a collaborative environment.

*The Follower Identity*

The follower action plan was described by teachers who "go along" with initiatives, mandates, and other impositions to their teaching autonomy as requisite for the public school teacher. The teacher who operates from the follower identity does what she is told and is neither overtly critical nor supportive of the imposition. Teachers who use the follower identity construct teaching autonomy through the creative process of teaching, identified in the transcript data as "the how" of teaching. Teachers who perform the follower identity assert that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) usurp individual teacher authority regarding selection of content and skills. All ten teachers in the study perform the follower identity action plan and defer their authority to determine the knowledge and skills needed by their students to the state mandated knowledge and skills (TEKS) selected by external authorities. As one teacher explained, "We are definitely held accountable to teach the TEKS. Curriculum-wise, that is what we need to teach, that is what we do teach, and that is not negotiable. How you teach it, yes. But, that is what we're required to teach" (O: 16). From the follower stance, teachers all agreed the concepts, knowledge, and skills required by the state must be implemented without question.

The follower identity action plan was present in all ten transcripts and teachers repeated the idea that teaching autonomy is constructed in the process of deciding how the knowledge or skill would be taught in their classrooms. This finding suggests that teachers at both school sites conform to the expectation that the state will set the standards for each grade level regarding what knowledge and skills will be taught without question. Teachers follow the TEKS, yet still retain teaching autonomy through the

process of differentiating instruction based on student need as explained by a Palomares teacher,

> But, in terms of setting up for a classroom, how we teach is up to us because, for example, I'm the inclusion teacher, the bilingual inclusion teacher, so I have to differentiate for my students and if I didn't have say-so in how to do that it would be very difficult (P: 48).

Teachers who perform the follower identity take the path of least resistance to implementation of school reform initiatives, mandates and policies that impose on their teaching autonomy and teachers work within the framework imposed, rather than question the imposition. In the case of this Overton teacher, when asked about how she manages outside impositions to her teaching autonomy replied,

> I am not sure I know what you mean by manage it. First of all, I understand usually where those things are coming from; I like to stay up on what the District is saying and what they are doing, and what is the new thing. Most of the time you can work those things in. Like I said, I have never been in the situation where somebody came in and said, I want to see that, I do not think you are doing it. We do the best we can, and try to work it in with the time that we have (O: 17).

Teachers who use the follower identity discussed impositions to their teaching autonomy from a perspective of acceptance. The Overton teacher was not sure what I meant by the idea of having to manage an imposition to her teaching autonomy. This is likely because the follower stance includes the belief that a mandate is not necessarily an imposition to her teaching autonomy, especially if the teacher is aware of the initiative and goes along

with it by "working it in" to her classroom. For instance, all ten teachers in the study accept the state standards as a non-negotiable feature of the public school environment where there is no free will to operate outside the TEKS. Free will, expressed as freedom to decide what, when and how to teach is only achieved through the process of deciding how to teach, as this teacher from Overton who rated her autonomy high explained.

> I don't think about autonomy a lot. We work as a team…for the first grade team we work together, but, I'll admit I'm not very good at it when we want to plan together, when it gets very specific, I like to have the objectives we are going to teach, the big picture. Then, how you teach it is up to you. But I feel like our team has worked through the issues, so that we can all be as autonomous as we choose (O: 17).

The follower stance is supported in the bureaucratic organizational structure of the public school system where teachers are expected and trained to comply with state standards, and other top-down decisions. The follower identity allows teachers to believe that they aren't experiencing any impositions to their teaching autonomy because the expectation that public school teachers will comply with certain impositions, such as the TEKS, is a deeply ingrained belief. This belief was supported in the quantitative data results indicating that teachers at Overton and Palomares were similar in their responses to items on the questionnaire related to curricular autonomy. This belief allows teachers to rationalize impositions to teaching autonomy from the stance that their teaching autonomy is not really affected by external impositions because she always retains the ability to bring personal creativity to the lesson when she decides how she will teach the required concept or skill.

> I did not feel like the IPG's influenced my professional autonomy because I always try to use creativity. If you are creative, you can always take those top-down initiatives and fit whatever it is they want into what you are teaching, as long as you are teaching the TEKS, and making sure you that you are covering what they want you to cover (O: 22).

A Palomares teacher who rated her autonomy high discussed the external impositions on her time and on her ability to help her students with science fair because of the Focus School requirement that she had to attend a mandatory science workshop for low performing schools. The teacher operates from the follower stance in that she gives up something she loves in order to make sure she "hits" all the TEKS, and that once her students have mastered a skill, she must move on to the next one, rather than spend time on the science fair. In this way, the follower stance differs from the supporter because the teacher does what she is supposed to do, yet it is against her preference. If she had true teaching autonomy, she would make the decision to help students with the science fair and not worry that she was behind in covering the TEKS. Though she is critical of the time constraints imposed on her, she does not work to get the issue resolved, as would a teacher who approached this situation from the action plans of the critic or the activist.

> I do feel freedom to teach what and how I want to teach as long as it matches the TEKS, probably not as much as I did last year though, because of the fact that we are now a Focus School. Being a Focus School means that we are the focus of certain committees and offices, and we get extra help. I do feel this extra attention has affected my professional autonomy; more so, it has to do with the time constraints imposed – extra

> papers, extra meetings. The effect that it takes on you, like not having enough time to help my kids with a science fair, I love the science fair, the past two years, but now I had a mandatory science workshop last week for mostly lower performing schools, so that took days out of my time with my students. The days away that I miss from my students I have to crunch time, so it is pretty much to the point where I do not get to do a lot of extra elaboration or a break-off, fun projects that they can do for science fair. We just have to hit a science concept, master it, hit, master, and go on (P: 39).

The follower stance communicates compliance even if the teacher may not prefer, or agree with, what an external authority is requiring. This is the key difference between the follower identity and the supporter identity. The teacher using the follower action plan goes along with impositions to teaching autonomy, even if she believes that her students may benefit from something different. Therefore, her beliefs about what is best for her students are not aligned with those of external authorities. Unlike the professional identity action plan, the follower stance does not communicate a belief in knowing better than external authority to support her autonomous actions. Instead, the follower stance communicates that decisions made and imposed by external authorities on the classroom must be complied with because it is a requirement of the job of being a teacher. Teachers who operate from the follower identity do not just put on the appearance of compliance, as does a teacher operating from the pacifist stance. The teacher who performs the follower action plan actually complies with external authority, and for this reason, the identity is supported and valued in the bureaucratic organizational structure of the public

school. Teachers who operate from the follower identity action plan of compliance construct teaching autonomy through decision making that is required of all teachers, as an Overton teacher who rated her autonomy low explained. "I think our principal has given us the freedom to accelerate when needed, re-teach when needed. As long as we teach the TEKS…teaching the concepts that Texas requires us to teach"(O: 16).

The primary purpose for performing the action plan of the follower identity stems from the belief that teachers are expected to comply with certain mandates, reform initiatives, and policies without question. Teachers generally want to get along in the system of public education and fulfill the expectations of what it means to be a teacher in the state of Texas. The follower action plan communicates a tacit understanding that if you want a job as a public school educator, you will not have authority over certain decisions that influence your classroom.

When teachers perform the follower identity, the outcome is that top-down reform initiatives, mandates and policies are enacted as planned by external authorities. Based on the findings of this study, external authorities have some insurance that teachers will implement programs as planned and will follow grade level curriculum standards without question. The bureaucratic features of the public school environment rely on the teacher using the follower identity. This is supported by the claim one teacher, a first grade teacher from Palomares, made that she must follow certain impositions to her teaching autonomy because, if not, she is "breaking the law" (P: 44).

> I have the TEKS and I have my IPG's and I have Scott Foresman, and there are different levels of how much I have to stick to those different things. Obviously, I have to teach the TEKS, that's part of being a teacher

> in Texas. Part of being a teacher at this school is you have to teach Scott Foresman, so you're supposed to do that and if I choose not to then I'm breaking the law (P: 44).

The follower identity receives role support from all levels of external authority – campus, district, state and federal. The state mandated curriculum must be taught and so all agree there is no room for personal autonomy over the decision of content. By focusing on the process, or the *how of teaching,* teachers feel they assert autonomy over decisions that have been made for them when they decided to teach in the state of Texas.

## Passive Stances of Teaching Autonomy

The four ruled role identities of the pacifist, novice, supporter and follower described by the teachers in the interview data explain how teachers manage to passively assert authority and construct teaching autonomy in the public school setting. Because of the paradox of teaching autonomy, teachers must operate in a school system that has conflicting governance structures that create situations, which require teachers to both actively and passively be involved in the decision making process regarding their classroom. The findings of this study on teaching autonomy are based on the ways teachers described beliefs, actions and assumptions about their role in the decision making process and whether they actively or passively asserted individual authority over important classroom decisions that ultimately influence student achievement. This original theory of teaching autonomy based on the stances teachers take regarding their ability to make important classroom decisions was developed using classical Glaserian grounded theory methods.

*Synthesis of the Findings*

A Role Identity Theory of Teaching Autonomy

Teaching autonomy, defined as the teacher's ability to make important decisions regarding the classroom, was found to result from patterns of behavior teachers engaged in while either asserting or deferring personal authority over these decisions. These patterns of behavior were indicative of a stance the teacher took when describing her attitude toward exerting teaching autonomy in a given situation. Teachers *in vivo* codes, (the participants common language or specialized terms) in the transcript data (e.g. "knowing better", " the pendulum swing" "just shutting the door") suggested teaching autonomy originated from actions and stances they took to explain and justify deferring or asserting their authority over classroom decisions (Glaser, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). Using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method, both data sets were mined for answers to the research questions:

1. What similarities and differences in teacher's perceptions of autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (high poverty, Title I or low poverty, non Title I)?
2. What factors are described by teachers as having an impact on their teaching autonomy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom and how do they connect this to student achievement?
3. In what ways do teachers describe actions of resistance or conformity to mandates that influence their teaching autonomy?

There were three main findings in this study of teaching autonomy. First, teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy are situational and vary from their fixed

scores on the TAS. Second, teacher's perceptions of teaching autonomy are not necessarily related to the degree of influence from external authority, and third, teaching autonomy originates from states of being enacted through eight identities described by teachers in the study, which were determined by the teacher's stance and role she selected when exercising authority over making the decisions that affect her students and her classroom. Additional findings are that perception of teaching autonomy using the quantitative measure of Pearson & Hall's (1993) Teaching Autonomy Scale does not fully explain how teachers perceive their autonomy in the workplace. This was noted in the contradictions between transcript data in which teachers described stances and patterns of behavior when discussing teaching autonomy that did not match the teacher's score on the TAS. For instance, teachers who scored high on the TAS described actions and stances that were the same as teachers who perceived their autonomy low on the TAS.

Item analysis of the TAS revealed some differences between the teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy between the two economically diverse schools. A significant difference ($p < .05$) was found on four items related to general autonomy: creativity, selection of student learning activities, ability to have input into solving major problems, and control over setting classroom standards of behavior. Palomares teachers perceive lower general autonomy and they are not as free to be creative in their teaching approach as teachers at Overton. Related to the perception of lack of freedom to be creative, was the finding that Palomares teachers perceive less control over the selection of student learning activities. As Palomares teachers described in the transcript data, external authorities have greater control over selection of curriculum, specifically the

Reading First Program. Other constraints are placed on the Palomares staff due to the Focus School designation. The Focus School label limits teachers' ability to select student learning activities because they have little input into the major decisions that are made regarding selection of content, programs, pacing and time spent on daily instruction. Additionally, Palomares staff is watched more frequently for evidence of compliance than Overton teachers and have many visitors to the classroom, as often as twice a week. The visitors conduct walk-throughs to look for specific areas of compliance, such as whether teachers are teaching the 90-minute scripted Reading First program as intended. Though both schools participated in a district initiative called Positive Behavior Supports, which sets school wide and classroom guidelines for behavior, the Palomares teachers perception of ability to set classroom behavior standards was lower than for teachers at Overton. The differences between the two campuses on these four items related to general autonomy supports the hypothesis that teachers at Palomares would perceive a work environment where they have less creativity and less involvement in the decision making over important classroom decisions, like selection of learning activities and standards for classroom behavior. Teachers at Palomares confirmed this assertion in the transcript data by discussing factors that impact their teaching autonomy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom. Palomares teachers described external authority measures related to teaching at a Title 1, high poverty campus (for example frequent monitoring for compliance and implementation of reform initiatives) as contributing to their low perceptions of creativity and ability to make important decisions. Teachers at Palomares described situations where their professional knowledge about what students needed instructionally in order to achieve

was disregarded by external authorities. This disregard for the teachers' professional opinion was described as a lack of respect. This belief contributed to teachers taking stances that called for confronting and challenging authority or withdrawing and making decisions they believed were better for their students. In these instances, externally imposed reform agendas were not furthered by the teachers.

Teachers at both campuses described actions of resistance, or conformity to mandates that influence their teaching autonomy. Both Overton and Palomares teachers described situations where they resisted the implementation of the Instructional Planning Guides as written. However, Palomares teachers reported more resisting behaviors than Overton teachers and were more likely to take the stance of the identities that are resistant to impositions on teaching autonomy. These role identities were identified in this theory as the activist, the critic and the pacifist. Teachers at Overton used these identities to construct teaching autonomy, however, not with the same frequency and intensity as Palomares teachers.

All ten teachers, irrespective of campus or TAS score, conform to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills without question. Teachers did discuss the TEKS, (grade level, subject matter standards) as a factor that impacts their day-to-day learning environment. The TEKS are used for planning and are the gauge by which student achievement is measured in the state. A common phrase among participants in the qualitative study was they achieved teaching autonomy in the "how" of teaching. If you have a license to teach in the state of Texas, "what" you teach, the TEKS, is not negotiable. Contradicting this communicated belief were the teacher's scores on the TAS. For instance, several items on the TAS were written to determine a teacher's perception

of her curricular autonomy, specifically of her ability to determine what she teaches in the classroom. On the quantitative measure, teachers said they believed they determined what was taught in the classroom, yet in the interview data reveal that they defer the actual decision of "what" to teach to the state of Texas.

Implementation of The Principles of Learning initiative was both resisted by teachers and implemented by teachers, which reveals that what one teacher may believe is an imposition to her teaching autonomy, another teacher may readily conform to and implement as written. Some teachers described actions of fully embracing the initiative because they agreed with the major tenets of the reform, or they trusted the implementer. Others discussed the reform as a "pendulum swing' initiative, or a fad, soon to be replaced by something else.

These findings led to the development of the role identity theory of teaching autonomy presented in this chapter. As this theory continued to evolve through theoretical sampling, it became clear that teaching autonomy consisted of a series of symbolic, internalized actions that teachers take in a given situation while assuming a particular stance regarding their role as authority over important classroom decisions for a given situation. The process of theoretical sampling described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) required that I explore the theoretical codes resulting from the analysis of the major concepts revealed in the interview data: identity and role. Together, these concepts combined as role identity, seemed to explain the major variance among the relationships between and within the categories of high and low autonomy and high and low poverty workplace and fit with the teachers' descriptions of how they constructed teaching autonomy. In this way, role identity evolved as the theoretical code, or unifying concept,

that explained the varied patterns of behavior teachers enacted regardless of school site or perceived level of teaching autonomy on the TAS.

### Support for the Finding of a Role Identity Theory of Teaching Autonomy

Role identity theory posits that all teachers will have multiple identities and roles that are actively created and internalized through a serious of symbolic actions (McCall & Simmons, 1978). According to McCall & Simmons, role identity is an imaginative view of one's self that encompasses a person's beliefs about how to think, act and behave in a given situation as an occupant of a particular social position. The imaginative view of self in the role identity is an idealized version, unlikely to be consistently attained and to have standards of conduct and achievement that are theoretical rather than practical. Additionally, role identities are constantly evolving, as the individual who is also constantly changing and interacting with others constructs and reconstructs the content of the role identity. Role identities give meaning to the routine of daily life and help teachers determine how they will interpret various situations, events, and other people they encounter through their work with children. This theory of teaching autonomy better explains how teachers actually behave on school campuses when they are engaged in decision making activities related to their classrooms and students.

Role identity was associated with the stance the teacher verbalized when choosing various ways of exerting her teaching autonomy. The stance combined with the action plan described by teachers in the study lead to the connection of role identity with the symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969), which evolved as the theoretical framework for the study. Blumer's (1969) theory that humans socially construct meaning through interpretation of actions and Mead's theory (1934) that *self*

arises out of social experience as an object of socially symbolic gestures and interactions both explain and provide a framework for analyzing the patterns of behavior common to the ten research participants. "From the interactionist viewpoint, roles are packages of behavior from which actors selectively sample, creating highly personalized and improvised performances" (MacKinnon, 1994, p. 84). Role performances serve to legitimate the role identities that teachers select in various situations. Because the various role identities are idealized and idiosyncratic conceptions of the self, the realities of daily life are constantly jarring these perceptions and creating difficulties and contradictions, which teachers reconcile by seeking to maintain these idealized versions of self through role performance (McCall & Simons, 1996). According to role identity theory, teachers must claim some identity, or others will force an identity upon them. Regardless of whether an identity is forced or claimed, the teacher must act in such a way that confirms the idealized version of self the identity communicates. This action leads to what McCall & Simmons have labeled "role support, which is the expressed support accorded to an actor by his audience for his claims concerning the role identity" and is "a set of reactions and performances by others, the expressive implications of which tend to confirm one's detailed and imaginative view of oneself as an occupant of a position" (1966, pp. 70-71). Role support is the implied confirmation teachers receive from others, which confirms the specific contents of the action plan they have selected for constructing teaching autonomy for that situation. Yet, the confirmation received by others works in tandem with the teacher's own view of herself in the identity selected to garner teaching autonomy, for as McCall and Simmons point out, each of us is our own most important audience (1966, pp. 70-71).

*An Original Grounded Theory of Teaching Autonomy*

This role identity theory is a different conceptualization of teaching autonomy than previously reported in the literature. Teaching autonomy is typically described as an entity that can be conferred upon teachers as part of the professional model of occupations. The professional model developed in the study of occupations through the discipline of sociology defines the characteristics used to distinguish one profession from another. Researchers have attempted to elevate the profession of teaching to include properties of other professional occupations, usually doctor and lawyer, where a high degree of professional autonomy is a key feature (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teaching autonomy also has been previously defined as lists of behaviors, and in this study as having two dimensions, general and curricular, which can be quantifiably measured (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Thought of in this way, teaching autonomy is explained from a theoretical framework of professionalism which assumes teachers operate with the freedom to choose, and once licensed and credentialed, have free will to make important decisions in all aspects of their professional lives from classroom management to instructional focus, selection of materials and pacing of lessons. Though teaching autonomy arising from professionalism was found to occur in this study, it did not fully explain the ways teachers exercise free will in the workplace with a goal of achieving autonomy.

The findings of this study veer from this static and conferred concept of teaching autonomy as a construct that can be granted to teachers by virtue of meeting the credentials, earning a license and entering the occupation of professional educator. Rather than conferred by the profession, or being a set of fixed, quantifiable descriptors, this

study reveals teaching autonomy is personally constructed. Furthermore, teaching autonomy emerged as a shifting and transitory concept, which is socially constructed by teachers through a series of actions and assumed roles that are used for different purposes and which have different outcomes. One possible explanation for teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy shifting from the fixed indicator of their TAS scores is they must learn to navigate a paradoxical governance system that is inconsistent in the value placed on the ability of teachers to make the decisions that yield teaching autonomy. This may also explain why all ten teachers in the study constructed teaching autonomy somewhat independently from school assignment. The eight role identities named in this study are open to any teacher as a means of constructing teaching autonomy. The mismatch between a teacher's perceived degree of autonomy on the TAS, when compared to her interview transcript data and school assignment, was the first indicator of the need for an alternate theory and way of understanding teaching autonomy. This grounded theory of teaching autonomy attempts to explain a phenomenon the data show is shifting, rather than fixed, and socially constructed, rather than professionally conferred.

Teachers were selected for participation in the study to contrast workplace environments and selected for interviews precisely because they perceived high or low teaching autonomy. Therefore, I did not expect for teachers who perceived low autonomy to describe the same action plans, stances and behaviors of teachers with high autonomy, yet that was the primary finding in the interview data. Once I was able to discard my previous notions that a teachers' perceived teaching autonomy score and school site would have a significant relationship to the qualitative interview data, I was able to arrive at the explanation of teaching autonomy developed in this chapter. In

Chapter Five, the implications of these findings, conclusions and recommendations for future research are presented.

# Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

There are several implications of the discovery of a role identity theory of teaching autonomy on the extant literature. Chapter Five presents the implications following the results of data analysis using Glaserian, or classical grounded theory method, to describe the phenomenon of teaching autonomy at two economically diverse public elementary schools. Use of this method revealed a different way of conceptualizing teaching autonomy than previously described in the literature. Specifically, the construct of teaching autonomy has been previously determined to be quantifiable in two dimensions, curricular and general using an 18-item scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This perspective of teaching autonomy describes a construct of individual authority over making important decisions that affect the classroom, from selection of content, to setting a schedule. Other research has demanded teachers be given a certain amount of professional autonomy once they have met the licensing, credentialing and certification requirements required by state boards for educator certification. This call for the professionalization of teaching has been tied to the standards movement and to measuring the success of teachers based on student performance on state assessments.

The problems with describing teaching autonomy as a score for a set of indicators of one's perception of individual authority over making classroom decisions are addressed in this chapter. First, teachers do not have individual authority over making all classroom decisions in the public school classroom. Yet, teachers rated the Teaching Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) as if they did. And teachers, even when licensed and credentialed, do not necessarily gain teaching

autonomy from the act of hanging a teaching certificate on their classroom wall. This study of teaching autonomy led to a different conceptualization of the phenomenon than that of a quantifiable and conferred construct. Therefore, the primary implication of the role identity theory presented in this dissertation is one of challenging previous notions about the nature of what constitutes teaching autonomy and how individual teachers on public school campuses exercise it.

When this research was first conceptualized, I had many preconceived notions about teaching autonomy and the ways in which external sources of control worked to reduce teaching autonomy, especially, I conjectured, for those unfortunate teachers working at Title I schools. Setting up the study to juxtapose the two sets of teachers, those at Title I schools (high poverty) and those at non Title I schools (low poverty), I was convinced I knew in advance the answer to the first research question:

> 1. What similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of autonomy can be described and how do these relate to the characteristics of their school assignment (Title 1 high poverty, or non Title 1 low poverty)?

Secretly, I was concerned I had designed the study knowing its outcome ahead of time. I was sure the findings of the study would support my hypothesis that teachers in the current accountability climate would have perceptions of teaching autonomy correlated to the external accountability measures imposed on the school site following the *Spheres of Influence on Teacher's Perceptions of Teaching Autonomy* presented in Chapter One (See Figure 1, p. 5). This led naturally to a belief that suffering under the external accountability constraints of working at a Title I school would be related to teachers' perceptions of low teaching autonomy at the school selected to represent the working

environment of the oppressed in this study, Palomares Elementary. In fact, I worried there would be so few teachers at Palomares with high teaching autonomy, there might be no one to interview. A dissertation is both the ending and beginning of a researcher's journey into the exploration of a phenomenon of interest. I believed this study of teaching autonomy was going to begin my career by revealing the oppressive nature of working conditions at Title I schools that both destroy teaching autonomy and narrow the opportunities for students of color, poverty and language difference who are assigned to the teachers' classrooms. This is not quite what I found. Instead, I found teachers at both sites were actively engaged in constructing teaching autonomy, or in justifying why they were allowing others to make important classroom decisions mostly independently of their school's demographic characteristics.

*Impact of the Method on Research Analysis and Conclusions*

Glaserian, or classical grounded theory, method demanded that I look at my data without the preconceived notions I had about teaching autonomy. I learned through this process that, according to Glaser's (1967, 2002) method, I should not have conducted my literature review prior to collecting the research data. All of the research I had studied and cited in Chapter Two related to my preconceived notions about teaching autonomy at economically diverse campuses. Glaser believes that the researcher will not, and should not, know what literature to review prior to analyzing the data. The data should lead to the discovery of theoretical codes, which Glaser directs will require the act of theoretical sampling, going back into the data and the literature to find a unifying theoretical concept that explains the phenomenon under study. In part, I am happy that I worked through the requirements of my university for submitting the proposal, which included submitting a

literature review chapter, before I completely understood Glaserian classical grounded theory method. I learned from my mistake on my own, rather than having to try to justify to my committee why I should not write a literature review and explain a method I hardly understood at the time. Later, as I delved into the study of Glaser's grounded theory method, I soon despaired over all the extra work I had done in preparation for writing chapters four and five. I wrestled with shedding the barriers of my research design that impeded a classical grounded theory study of teaching autonomy, for it meant discarding and rethinking almost everything I had done. I have experienced the ending of my journey, the writing of this dissertation, with an open mind, trying to understand and reconcile Glaser's method with what I had set out to find about how teachers perceive their teaching autonomy in the workplace. The idea that I could develop a theory about teaching autonomy that transcends people, time and place was so intriguing that I eventually let go of my researcher baggage in favor of the ambiguity of developing an original grounded theory of teaching autonomy using Glaser's approach. The method of analysis I had chosen required being open to finding a theory grounded in both how the teachers rated their teaching autonomy on the quantitative measure and what the teachers were saying about teaching autonomy in the transcript data.

Glaser's method requires the researcher to consider all data collected as important to the development of the theory. Therefore, I needed to consider the quantitative data in the study side-by-side the teacher's transcript data collected for the qualitative study. Mixed method design gave two distinct data sets, but Glaser asserts all data significant to understanding the phenomenon of study should be considered *en totem,* rather than separately. However, the research design I had preconceived called for the juxtaposition

of the two groups of teachers by school characteristics. This seemed to demand an analysis of the data by schools. Furthermore, I believed the quantitative data from the teacher's scores on the TAS would be useful mostly for sorting participants into two other groups, so that teachers who scored highest and lowest on the quantitative measure could be selected for interviewing. Therefore, I initially conceptualized the quantitative data as useful only for sorting and selecting teachers for the interview. I placed more value on the teachers' interview data, than the data I collected from the quantitative study. Yet, the quantitative measure provided a framework for asking questions to direct the conversation of teachers in the qualitative study. In that regard, the quantitative measure and the qualitative measure were linked. Furthermore, the teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy represented by a score on the TAS of whether they felt free to make decisions was a single indicator of attitudes and beliefs about their individual authority. To follow Glaser's method meant I needed to look at the data sets as having equal value in informing this study of teaching autonomy. Therefore, the quantitative study data provided a way to analyze teacher responses by item and campus, in addition to use as a sorting and selecting tool.

The item analysis of the TAS showed a significant difference in ratings for general autonomy items between the two campuses and confirmed that teachers at Palomares do perceive less ability to make decisions related to classroom standards of conduct and perceive less personal on-the-job discretion. However, item analysis also revealed that the teachers at the two campuses were more alike than different regarding perception of ability to make decisions concerning content, pacing and selection of materials. This analysis revealed a discrepancy between the quantitative data and the

transcript data regarding how teachers with high autonomy rated the items on the scale related to curricular autonomy and what they said about their actual ability to make these types of decisions.

Glaser's idea of constant comparative analysis required that I look for a unifying theoretical concept grounded in both sets of data. Through memo writing on the codes I found in the transcript data, where teachers discussed answers to the questions I designed to have them talk about teaching autonomy, patterns of behavior and stances regarding how they exercised individual authority over important classroom decisions emerged. The qualitative study data suggested teachers construct teaching autonomy from several different stances, which were revealed as they discussed interview questions designed to gain insight into the two remaining research questions:

2. What factors are described by teachers as having an impact on their personal authority and efficacy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom and how do they connect this to student achievement?
3. In what ways do teachers resist or conform to mandates that influence their professional autonomy?

In the interview data, teachers identified several factors that impeded the exercise of individual authority over important classroom decisions. One of these factors, identified by all ten teachers in the study, was implementation of the district's Instructional Planning Guides, which sets a pacing and organizational suggestion for the teaching of the state's Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills by grade level and discipline. The IPG's curricular reform attempts to control the pacing and content decisions for each grade level by grading period. While teachers would rate the statement, "What I teach in

my class is determined for the most part by myself" as being definitely true, in the interview, they identified the state of Texas as the primary source for determining what a teacher will teach in her classroom and discussed the IPG's as a guide for determining the pacing of lessons correlated to the TEKS. Furthermore, in the interviews, teachers identified group authority to make these decisions, through grade level team meetings, while indicating on the TAS that selection of content and skills taught in their classrooms were under their individual control. Because the teachers' scores on the TAS and the teachers' transcript data did not align, I concluded trying to quantify perceptions of teaching autonomy using a questionnaire is not sufficient for understanding the phenomenon.

*Problems with Trying to Quantify a State of Being*

The 18-item questionnaire requires teachers to rate various actions and behaviors indicative of teaching autonomy using a 4-point Likert scale. In the study, I discovered teachers at both sites may indicate their teaching autonomy to be high based on how they rated items on the scale, related to their ability to make classroom decisions, such as pacing of instruction, and selection of materials, yet describe behaviors and stances in the interview data that indicated they do not have the ability to make autonomous decisions regarding content and pacing in certain situations. One such situation was the belief, communicated by all ten teachers in the interview data, that they must follow the grade level TEKS which dictate content, knowledge and skills for all subjects. Teachers described the implementation of the state standards for all grade levels and subjects as a "non-negotiable" mandate. This belief communicated in the interview data indicates teachers may not consider the requirement to follow the TEKS as a type of curricular

decision for which they have input and therefore, they answered questions on the TAS as if the imposition did not exist. Likewise, teachers who perceived little ability to make decisions regarding pacing and selection of materials on the quantitative measure, described actions and stances they took to exercise teaching autonomy when student need motivated the decision to do so. The disparity between how teachers rated their teaching autonomy on the TAS and how they described their teaching autonomy in the interview indicates that using a quantitative measure is not sufficient to understanding the factors that contribute to a teacher's perception of teaching autonomy. Furthermore, all teachers in the interview study, regardless of school site, made curricular decisions that veered from mandates, if they believed it was best for their students, and if they saw their decision as one that would positively impact a student's achievement. In this regard, all teachers articulated an ability to exercise individual authority over external authority when making decisions for their specific students. In these instances, teachers described the actions and beliefs of a teacher with high autonomy, though they appeared as a teacher with low autonomy in the analysis of the quantitative data. This lends further support for Glaser's (2002) recommendation to consider all of the data as a whole when exploring a phenomenon, as a singular analysis using only the quantitative measure would have led to a conclusion that the samples were not very different in their perceptions of teaching autonomy.

Given that teachers at both campuses were purposefully juxtaposed for comparison based on whether they worked at a Title I or a non-Title I campus, the study was designed to look for differences, rather than similarities in the data. However, the analysis of the quantitative data seemed to show more similarities than differences

between the two sets of teachers and their perceptions of teaching autonomy as measured by the TAS. Teachers at the two campuses were similar in response to fourteen items on the scale that addressed primarily curricular autonomy. I concluded from this analysis that the expectation that all public school teachers in the state will comply with implementation of the state standards and that districts will align curriculum to the state standards is a deeply ingrained belief, and one which teachers do not seem to acknowledge when asked to discuss this aspect of teaching autonomy.

## Implications for Practice

Teachers at both sites shared the belief that curriculum, or the *what* of education are decisions made at the district, state and federal level. Public school teachers readily accept this fact and understand curricular teaching autonomy from a view of making decisions over pedagogical concerns, such as *how* to present the required knowledge and skills creatively and in a way that engages their students. Teachers at Overton did not have the constraints imposed on programming that Palomares teachers did, such as implementation of the Reading First Program. Yet, teachers at both campuses perceived curricular autonomy in a similar distribution of high and low scores on the TAS. In the transcript data teachers revealed pedagogical concerns over the *how* of teaching the required curriculum. Teachers, within the sphere of the classroom readily made decisions concerning how to teach the required curriculum. However, teachers in the study did not question the imposition of state standards or the decision by external authorities at the district, state or federal levels to determine what the teacher should teach. This finding suggests that teachers do not understand the state imposed curriculum as a political act in the same way that the researcher understands it as described in the

literature review. It is a popular notion that a curriculum based on state standards sets a common ground or playing field against which to measure a student's achievement. The rationale explained by those who take this position is that we must have a common set of standards by which to measure students at any school in the state, or in the nation. Therefore, a curriculum tied to the state standards is deemed necessary if students are to do well on the state assessment used for accountability purposes. Teachers in the study did not specifically discuss the idea of curriculum aligned to what is tested on the state assessment as a factor that imposed on their teaching autonomy. This may be because curriculum is such a broadly defined category. For example, there is the formal curriculum prescribed by local, state and federal authorities; the operational curriculum presented by the teachers in the classroom; the hidden curriculum that reveals societal features of the culture in which the curricula are presented; and the curriculum as it is experienced by the student (Apple, 1978; Goodlad, Klein & Tye, 1979). Teachers in the study discussed teaching autonomy from the formal, operational and experiential aspects of curriculum. The hidden curriculum did not enter into the discussion of teaching autonomy in an explicit way in this study. Rather, teachers did see the district imposed curriculum guides (IPG's) as helpful to new teachers, while other more experienced teachers saw the guides as unreasonable and unhelpful to them as professionals. These teachers disagreed with the pacing or sequencing of teaching students a given skill, not with the actual skill and knowledge required in the document. Future research on the curricular dimension of teaching autonomy could explore how teachers understand the different levels of curriculum and whether other role identities explain how the hidden curriculum influences teaching autonomy.

*Palomares Teachers Have Lower Perceptions of General Autonomy*

The five Palomares teachers, who participated in the interviews, identified the Reading First Program, a curricular intervention required by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* as a factor that impacted their individual authority. Palomares teachers had the added imposition to teaching autonomy of being identified by the district as a Focus School. This meant the campus was subjected to frequent visits by external authorities in the form of learning walks, where teachers were actively monitored for compliance with mandated curriculum and other initiatives. Because of these intense interventions intended to raise the student achievement level on the state assessment, teachers at Palomares did differ in a statistically significant way on four items related to general teaching autonomy from the teachers at Overton, who were not affected by the intervention of frequent monitoring by external authorities and compliance walk-through visits. Therefore, impositions to teaching autonomy, such as top-down mandates coming from external authority, did have a relationship to how teachers perceived teaching autonomy differently between the two sites in both the quantitative and the qualitative study. Teachers at Palomares discussed these monitoring visits and checks for compliance as contributing to feeling a loss of respect for their ability as teachers to make decisions for the classroom. Even though the Reading First Program at Palomares is considered a curricular intervention, teachers did not differ significantly from Overton teachers in their perceptions of curricular teaching autonomy. However, the difference between the two groups of teachers was significant in overall lower perceptions of general on-the-job discretion to make important classroom decisions. This feeling of not having much discretion to vary from the Reading first Program was communicated by

teachers at Palomares through stories of resistance and belief that they did not have individual authority to stray from the scripted program. There is evidence in this study for what Cawelti (2006) calls "a skewed curriculum", one side effect of NCLB policy. Noting that across the country schools have narrowed the curriculum to focus on math and literacy, Cawelti provides evidence that NCLB has created an imbalance in classrooms where students are receiving an education devoid of the arts, sciences, foreign languages and physical education. This idea was supported in the interview data as classroom teachers at both sites focused mostly on the subjects of mathematics and literacy when discussing student achievement.

## Implications for Future Research

Future research is recommended to address how being watched by external authorities impacts a teacher's perceptions of self-efficacy, which is related to the teacher's perception of teaching autonomy and one of few teacher characteristics related to student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tucker et al., 2005). Teachers with a sense of personal efficacy believe that students can achieve in spite of obstacles they may face outside the classroom, such as poverty and peer influences. Given that teachers at the high poverty campus are less likely to perceive the ability to make important classroom decisions related to general teaching autonomy, this finding implies that teachers at high poverty campuses will also have lower perceptions of self-efficacy. Teachers who perceive self-efficacy believe they are the best person to make decisions concerning what particular students need in order to achieve, therefore, a study that explored the relationship between identities teachers use when constructing teaching autonomy, such as the activist, and perceptions of self-efficacy would add to this

theory of teaching autonomy. This future research could explore how the role identities presented in this study work in conjunction with a teacher's perception of self-efficacy to influence student achievement.

However, because teachers at the two sites were more alike than different in the analysis of the research data, my original plan to analyze the study data by school campus to juxtapose the differences in teacher's perceptions of teaching autonomy between the sites was not utilized in the final reporting of data. Rather, the data from this study suggested that teachers at both sites were experiencing the curricular dimension of teaching autonomy mostly independently of campus demographic characteristics. This suggests that school demographic characteristics are not as important a factor in determining how teachers perceive their curricular teaching autonomy. Rather, this finding implies that public school teachers are all equally constrained by the macropolitical and micropolitical influences to curricular aspects of teaching autonomy. In the future, I would like to explore the role identity theory developed in this study to determine if future study participants construct teaching autonomy in the same ways as teachers in this study, across diverse sites and if certain identities are more prevalent at some sites than others. A future study with a larger sample of teachers would allow for the collection of interview data to achieve what Glaser (2002) calls theoretical sampling of the categories. This study could be designed to interview teachers regarding their teaching autonomy without using the TAS as a presorting tool. The TAS could be used in the future study after the teachers were interviewed to further illuminate the connection, or lack of connection, between the TAS scores and the eight identities presented in this theory. This research is needed to explain how these various identities

and action plans used by teachers to construct teaching autonomy impact and interact with workplace characteristics.

## Teaching Autonomy and Group Authority

As previously noted, an additional factor emerged in the analysis of the qualitative interview data, as impacting a teacher's ability to exercise individual authority over her classroom, that of group authority. A teacher's low or high score on the TAS did not illuminate group authority as a possible factor in how a teacher answered questions about individual authority to make and control the decisions that affect her classroom. In the interview study, teachers discussed the exercise of group authority over important classroom decisions, which influenced their individual authority by requiring group decision-making processes. Group authority, as a factor in the study, emerged as teachers discussed implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (DuFour, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), which is an example of an externally imposed initiative that required teachers to work together as teams to make group decisions for their students. Teachers discussed the decision-making they generated at team meetings from a perspective of a group authority, rather than individual or external authority. For example, teachers at both campuses described scenarios where they were charged as a group with taking autonomous actions by coming together as a team to discuss teaching and learning from the perspective of common work samples designed collaboratively to assess student achievement. Teachers described the teamwork required by PLC's as having a positive impact on their ability to analyze best practices that would impact student achievement in their classrooms. Therefore, a teacher may have answered item two on the TAS, "The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under

my control," with a score of one, definitely false, due to participation in team activities where activities are selected by the group. This finding led to the conclusion that a teacher's score on a quantitative measure of teaching autonomy is not sufficient in describing the democratic processes used in the public schools for making group decisions. In order to fully understand and explain teaching autonomy, researchers should be careful of drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on the use of a single measure, like that of Pearson & Hall's (1993) TAS, that does not account for group decision making. This also calls into question whether a "low" score on the TAS should be interpreted as a negative characteristic of the individual teacher. A teacher could answer questions on the TAS which indicates she perceives low teaching autonomy, yet be actively engaged in making decisions with her team. Likewise, researchers should also consider whether a teacher who answers the questions to indicate a perception of high autonomy is a positive characteristic. Though having a certain degree of teaching autonomy is highly valued by teachers and other stakeholders who expect teachers to be able to make important classroom decisions, the reality is that teachers don't make very many decisions regarding their classroom and students by themselves. The results of this study indicate that teachers actively construct teaching autonomy through various actions and whether they perceive a situation where they can exert individual, or group authority, or whether they must sublimate individual authority in deference to external authority. Therefore, the recommendation of this researcher is that future research on teaching autonomy should take into consideration the varying governance structures that influence the behaviors of public school teachers. These influences were presented in Chapter One and are represented by the macropolitical sphere of influence, generated from federal and

state authorities, and the micropolitical sphere of influence from district and campus authorities, all which compete with the teacher's individual authority over the classroom. Teaching autonomy cannot really be understood from a framework that ignores the interaction between teachers and these various authorities in the public school system of the accountability era.

### Findings Imply a Need for An Alternate Theory of Teaching Autonomy

Still other factors were described in the interview data that illuminated the need for a different way of understanding how teachers perceive their ability to exercise individual authority over the decisions important to their classrooms. These factors, identified by teachers in the qualitative study, were years of experience and/or assignment to a specialized position, such as art, bilingual or special education, which created a situation that allowed teachers to exercise individual authority over the decisions that yield teaching autonomy from an exclusionary position. Teaching at a grade level where students are not required to take the state assessment was also identified as a factor in a teacher's ability to exercise individual authority. Teachers in the study from both campuses, including those who perceived high autonomy and those who perceived low autonomy, identified these factors as having an impact on their ability to make independent, autonomous decisions. Several of these teachers asked at the faculty meetings when I administered the questionnaire if I even wanted them to participate in the study, as they saw themselves as outside of the impositions to teaching autonomy that other teachers face. By including all teachers, those with specialty positions and those with grade level responsibilities, the conclusions of this study have taken into account

varying perspectives of teachers who work in the public school system to arrive at the role identity theory of teaching autonomy presented in this dissertation.

A final factor, identified in the study by teachers at both campuses, was the Principles of Learning reform initiative, which was discussed as both imposing on and facilitating teaching autonomy. For example, a teacher from Overton who perceived low autonomy on the quantitative measure described the initiative as having a positive influence on her work with first grade students. She described the tenets of the initiative, in particular, that of creating rubrics with her students in an effort to have clear expectations for student work, as having a very powerful impact on her classroom. The initiative changed her practice and thinking about the involvement of young children in the process of setting standards for their work. In this way, what the teacher first described as an imposition she believed would not work with young children, was later embraced and incorporated into her work with first grade students. Her actions and beliefs about the initiative went from critical resistance based on an assumption that it was inappropriate for young children, to that of supporting a potential imposition to her teaching autonomy. The Principals of Learning initiative was described by another teacher in the study, as a fad, something that will soon fall out of favor, and be replaced by something else. This Overton teacher perceived high teaching autonomy on the quantitative measure and described the action of biding time, waiting for the pendulum to swing in the direction of some other initiative. By rejecting and ignoring the implementation of the Principles of Learning initiative, the teacher was able to make decisions regarding her classroom free from what external authorities imposed. This analysis of the factors described by teachers in the study as having an impact on their

personal agency, authority and efficacy in the day-to-day learning environment of the classroom revealed that what one teacher considers an imposition to her teaching autonomy may be regarded by another as facilitating teaching autonomy. Additionally, a top-down initiative one teacher considered being a factor that negatively impacted student achievement; another teacher in the study considered a factor that positively impacted student achievement. Furthermore, because teachers expressed beliefs and described actions in the transcript data that did not always correlate to their score of high or low perceptions of teaching autonomy, a main conclusion of this study is that teaching autonomy cannot be narrowly measured as score on a set of fixed indicators like Pearson & Hall's (1993) TAS. For example, a teacher who perceived the third highest autonomy in the study was a teacher at Palomares, the Title 1 School (P: 39). Yet, in the transcript data she described situations where she had very little teaching autonomy and sublimated her personal authority, which is inconsistent with her ratings on many questions. For instance, item seven on the questionnaire states, "The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control", which she answered as (4) definitely true. However, in the transcript data she reveals she had to attend a science in-service for teachers at the designated Focus Schools. Palomares has been identified as a Focus School and in need of intervention and monitoring due, in part, to the fifth graders poor performance on the state's science assessment. The Focus School designation required this teacher to be away from her classroom to attend the multi-day science training and she described the result as having a negative impact on her time to spend on something she loves-- the Science Fair. She described her science teaching as having to hit a concept, master it, and move on to the next one with no time to spend on projects. The grounded theory

analysis required that I examine the inconsistencies and contradictions between what teachers were saying about their teaching autonomy on the quantitative measure and in the qualitative study.

The examples provided here illustrate the process of analysis used in the study and how I arrived at the conclusion that a teacher's perception of her teaching autonomy is related to a stance taken regarding the teacher's role for exercising individual authority in a particular situation. This conclusion was further supported by analyzing the transcript data to answer the final research question as to how teachers in the study described acts of resistance and of conformity to top-down mandates and discussed actions they took to have, or to defer control over the important decisions affecting their classrooms. As teachers discussed actions of resistance or conformity to top-down mandates, it became clear that it takes a conscious effort to sublimate one's individual authority -- to give up personal decision-making and control of one's classroom and to subvert one's teaching autonomy. This is because being in control of one's classroom and making decisions based on personal professional knowledge is highly valued by teachers. This may explain why teachers will rate their autonomy high on a quantitative measure yet, describe in an interview, situations that indicate they are not in control of many of the decisions that impact their classrooms. In theory, teaching autonomy as a professional characteristic is also highly valued by employers of teachers and others concerned with public education. Yet, teachers understand that they work in a public school system, with many competing values, ideas, and beliefs about what is the best way to control the classroom and educate children. State and local education agencies, school boards and school districts exert their authority over teachers at the same time valuing a

teacher's control over her classroom and ability to make decisions based on professional knowledge of students' needs. Teachers in the study described actions and beliefs about their ability to exercise authority over classroom decisions, which indicated that teachers construct teaching autonomy in spite of a workplace that demands both professional autonomy and professional compliance.

*Role Identity Theory*

In answering the first research question concerning similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions of autonomy at the two sites, the results of the quantitative data analysis showed teachers' perception of general teaching autonomy were related to school setting. The quantitative data analyzed using the two-sample t-test showed a relationship between a low perception of general autonomy and assignment to a high poverty Title I school. This analysis also showed that teachers at both school sites were similar in perceptions of curricular teaching autonomy. Further analysis of the quantitative data using Glaser's (2002) constant comparative method, required that I examine the qualitative data for comparison of teachers' scores with their transcript data. This method of analysis led to the development of a role identity nature of teaching autonomy. The stances teachers were describing in the transcript data as they discussed their ability to take autonomous actions over important classroom decisions pointed to the discovery that teaching autonomy is a state of being. This discovery led the researcher back to the literature to explore teaching autonomy as a state of being concerned with the exercise of personal authority over making important decisions that affect the classroom. All states of being, including perceptions of teaching autonomy, are in constant flux,

shifting and transitory, so that one is not always acting autonomously (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1966).

Delving into the literature of Mead and Blumer led to the work of McCall & Simons (1966) and the role-identity model presented in *Identities and interactions, An examination of human associations in everyday life*. This model seemed to fit with the phenomenon of teaching autonomy I was finding in my transcript data. McCall and Simons defined role-identity as "the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position" and represents "his imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position" (McCall & Simons, 1966, p. 65). Study participants presented a variety of beliefs and scenarios regarding the role of the public school teacher as an authority over the important decisions concerning her classroom that yield teaching autonomy. McCall & Simons theory offered an explanation of the inconsistencies and contradictions between a participants' score on the TAS and the descriptions and stances they took in the interview data, which pointed to a need for understanding teaching autonomy in a different way than previously conceptualized as a list of behaviors that generated a fixed score. In addition to the idea that teaching autonomy can be reflected as a fixed score, it has been contended in the literature that in order to elevate teaching to the status of other professional occupations (usually compared to doctor and lawyer) teachers must be afforded a certain amount of professional autonomy through licensing and credentialing (Ingersoll, 1994; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This contention assumes that a teacher who completes the licensing and credentialing process will have a degree of professional autonomy conferred to the position of teacher. The study data showed that teaching

autonomy constructed through the stance of acting professionally was present in the transcripts of all ten teachers, five who rated their teaching autonomy high, and five who rated it low.

Therefore, I conclude that the teaching profession does allow for some conferred professional autonomy for teachers to exercise individual authority over decisions pertaining to their classroom. For instance, teachers are expected to make decisions regarding pacing and content, change lesson plan sequences and structure the amount of time afforded daily to the teaching of content, if their professional judgment for doing so is based on knowledge of their students' needs. Teachers also received conferred professional autonomy when their decisions for what specific students need to achieve were based on specialized training and knowledge of best practices. However, teachers in the study were not limited to constructing teaching autonomy from the stance of the professional operating from the position of one with conferred individual authority over the classroom. Furthermore, this did not explain why teachers who rated their autonomy low on the TAS, described the same actions for constructing teaching autonomy from the perspective of professionally conferred status, as those teachers who rated themselves high on the measure. This disparity between what the quantitative data were saying about how teachers perceive their autonomy and what the transcript data were saying about how teachers perceive teaching autonomy in the workplace was the first indication of the need for an alternate theory of teaching autonomy to be developed.

## Symbolic Interactionism: The Theoretical Framework of A Role-Identity Theory of Teaching Autonomy

Glaser's grounded theory method as described by Kathy Charmaz (2006) in *Constructing grounded theory, A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, requires that the researcher engage with the data during the constant comparative analysis and treat the analytic properties of the categories to rigorous scrutiny in order to extract a theoretical category that describes the phenomenon revealed in the data. It was through this process that the theoretical framework for this study of teaching autonomy was identified as symbolic interactionism. The term, symbolic interactionism, was coined by Blumer (1966), who was a student of George Herbert Mead. Mead (1934) first identified symbolic interaction as "a process essential for human group life" and he developed the perspective of "human beings as organisms possessing selves", and "human conduct in the form of constructed acts" (Blumer, 1966, p. 61). Prior to Meads' theory of symbolic interaction, the self was regarded as "some kind of psychological or personality structure" (Blumer, 1966, p. 63), a conceptualization that did not allow for the reflexive process of interacting in the world with other humans and the idea that through these interactions, the idea of self was a process, not a fixed structure. Blumer furthered Mead's theory with the publication of *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method* in 1966. Blumer asserts three premises that comprise the theory of how human beings interact. First, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that human beings have for them", second, "the meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" and third, "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing

with the things he encounters" (Blumer, 1966, p. 2). Through theoretical sampling, which required a recursive process of analysis of the data, Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism provided a framework for understanding how teachers in the study interacted with others in the public school setting when discussing their teaching autonomy. Blumer's theory allowed for, and helped to explain, what the transcript data revealed: teachers were constructing their teaching autonomy from several different stances, depending on the interaction between external authority, activities that required group authority, and their view of individual authority, and the subsequent stance they took was based on their interpretation of the role they should take in exercising teaching autonomy for the given situation. Teachers in the study described situations where they took a deferent role to external authority, allowing the external authority to rule over the classroom decisions that yield teaching autonomy, as in the decision to follow the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) without question. Additionally, teachers described situations where they took an active role to assert individual authority over external authority and be in charge of making the classroom decisions that yield teaching autonomy. From this stance, the teachers interpreted the need to exercise teaching autonomy from an assertive role of advancing individual authority over that of group, or external authority in the given situation, for example, when they took the identities of the specialist or the professional. The analysis of the transcript data from the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism led to the discovery of the role-identity nature of teaching autonomy presented in Chapter Four.

*The Roles of Ruler and Ruled in Teaching Autonomy: Implications for Practice*

The paradox presented by conceptualizing teaching autonomy as a set of behaviors teachers enact while shifting roles between the competing identities of the ruler and the ruled, explains the shifting and transitory nature of teaching autonomy as a phenomenon in this study. In a single school day, teachers may assume the actions and identities associated with both primary roles: the ruler and the ruled, when exercising teaching autonomy. Public school teachers work in an environment that expects compliance with external authority, ability to work with group authority, as well as ability to utilize individual authority in the act of independent decision making based on student need, or professional knowledge. In this way, society communicates the expectation that teachers will have the professional knowledge necessary to make important classroom decisions that yield teaching autonomy. Along with having the skills necessary to exercise individual authority, teachers are also expected to work within collaborative decision-making arrangements with colleagues, which call for group authority. Teachers working in teams may defer decision making to the group or advocate for a position with the group depending on how they see themselves and what role they select for interacting with the group. An example of this was seen in the transcript data of teachers who defer authority to others in the group who they deem more knowledgeable, characterized by the action plan of the novice identity. Teachers are also expected to follow top-down mandates, school reform initiatives, and other impositions to their teaching autonomy without exercising individual authority. The bureaucratic nature of public schools places an expectation on teachers to defer individual authority to external authority in cases where decisions have been made without their input and

imposed, as in the example of the Reading First Program. Based on Blumer's (1966) theory of symbolic interactionism, teachers are in a continual process of determining which role to play with regard to their teaching autonomy and level of authority for the situation presented. Teachers make their decision about which role to select, ruler or ruled, based on the situation. Future research using this role identity theory of teaching autonomy is needed to define the indicators that could be used by school leaders and others who work with teachers to determine which stances a teacher uses to exercise her authority. A researcher trained in educational psychology could refine this role identity theory of teaching autonomy to include psychometric indicators that practitioners could use to determine a teacher's perspective regarding teaching autonomy. This would be a useful tool for school leaders and others who work with teachers when observing in classrooms to determine the extent to which a teacher's actions describe the role identity categories as presented in the study. It would be useful for school leaders and teachers to have a deeper understanding of how the roles and identities teachers use to construct teaching autonomy impact the perception of self-efficacy and ability to positively influence student achievement.

For instance, when acting in the capacity of one who is ruled, by sublimating one's personal authority, teachers must have a willingness to give up personal decision-making and control of their classroom, and thereby subvert their teaching autonomy. Teachers in the study, operating from the stance of being ruled over, were still able to construct teaching autonomy through four primary actions. The actions of *conferring expert status*, *teaming and collaborating*, *complying with directives*, *biding time and withdrawing from conflict* were the strategies of the ruled when deferring to external

authority to make classroom decisions. These strategies allowed the teacher to play a passive role where teaching autonomy was concerned. The passive, ruled over stances allowed for teachers to justify why they were giving up actively asserting their individual authority over the classroom, and allowed for the teacher to rationalize the sublimation of her individual authority. Future research could explore the combinations of roles and identities characteristic of public school teachers. This research could provide further insight into how and why teachers move between the ruler and ruled roles within the public school system.

In this study, teachers sublimated individual authority when they gave up personal decision-making and control of one's classroom in deference to the authority of someone who knows better than they do, or to whom they perceive is smarter. Teachers readily believe that "someone smarter than me" (O: 21) came up with the imposed program and will support the implementation of the program on those grounds. *Conferring expert status* leaves the responsibility for important classroom decisions in the hands of others; external authorities that teachers believe have conducted research, or have some other form of superior knowledge. Teachers will also sublimate personal authority when they don't feel like the imposition from the external authority to their personal authority is worth fighting for and will withdraw from conflict. In this case, they may do what is asked of them, like reading a scripted program and giving up instructional time for another subject, because of the futility of fighting, a perception that it is not worth the effort. In other instances, they may just shut the classroom door and do what they believe is best. The action plans of the follower and the pacifist share these similar beliefs. Teachers use *withdrawing from conflict* and accept the external control imposed

on their classrooms for a variety of reasons. In some cases, teachers may not have knowledge of an alternative method or strong opinions in favor of an alternative method to the one imposed. In short, they simply may not care to be in charge of making certain decisions and sometimes are quite content about having certain parameters imposed on their teaching autonomy. This belief was observed in the interview data of all ten teachers concerning acceptance of the state standards as outlining the content, knowledge and skills for each grade level. The state standards, or TEKS are an example of an external control to teaching autonomy that is widely accepted by teachers. This particular discovery that teachers cannot always operate from a position of substantial authority over the decisions that yield teaching autonomy may be one reason that previous attempts to elevate teaching to the status of professionals like doctor and lawyer, as described in research on occupations, has done little to change the professional status of teachers.

However, if a teacher's belief in her personal knowledge and right to control the classroom is stronger than, or in conflict with the expert authority, she will not be able to sublimate authority and assume the role identities of the ruled. Instead, she will be compelled to adopt the role of the ruler and engage in the acts of asserting authority identified in the study: *acting professionally*, *questioning*, *resisting* and *advocating*. Teachers identified these strategies along with holding a specialty position to explain situations whereby they took the stance of the ruler and did not allow others to sublimate their professional authority to make decisions. This finding revealed that teachers at both sites, high poverty and low poverty, were using strategies to assert their individual authority over classroom decisions, despite situations calling for compliance, such as the

requirement that all teachers follow a curricular reform implemented through required use of the Instructional Planning Guides.

Through theoretical coding, the stances and action plans described by teachers in the study came to be represented by two role categories, that of the ruler and that of the ruled. The following ruler identities clustered the stances teachers took to actively assert the individual authority necessary to make the decisions that yield teaching autonomy: *acting professionally* became *the professional*, *questioning* became *the critic*, *having a specialty position* became *the specialist*, and *resisting and advocating* became *the activist*. Likewise, the ruled identities developed from clustering the stances and action plans teachers described when they operated from the position of one is who ruled over regarding their capacity to make the decisions that yield teaching autonomy. From this stance the ruled identities developed: *conferring expert status* became *the novice*, *teaming and collaborating* became *the supporter*, *complying with authority* became *the follower*, and *biding time and withdrawing from conflict* became *the pacifist*. Thus, following Glaser's idea of constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling of the data and the relevant literature, the eight identities presented in this study were developed. These identities were not tied to the time and place of the study. In other words, teachers at both sites described the action plans of the ruler and ruled identities and Glaser asserts that this role-identity theory of teaching autonomy should hold true in the future with other teachers and at other schools, should this study attempt to be replicated or applied to future research. The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and the substantive theoretical code of role-identity led to the primary conclusion of the study

that teaching autonomy is actively constructed, rather than professionally conferred as well as shifting and transitory.

*Teaching Autonomy is Actively Constructed and Situational*

Mead's (1934) theory of symbolic interaction required that "parties to such interaction must necessarily take each other's roles", which explains why teachers in this study constructed teaching autonomy from as many as eight different stances that represented ruled, as well as, ruler roles identified in the transcript data (Blumer, 1966, p. 9). By shifting roles, and using multiple identities (all which represent the participants' imaginative view of self, being and acting as an occupant of a certain position) teachers revealed that teaching autonomy was a state of being. The grounded theory of teaching autonomy presented in this study asserts teachers actively construct teaching autonomy by alternating between the roles of ruler and ruled and the associated identities. According to Glaser (2002) this theory should transcend time and place and be applicable to other research projects that seek to understand how a teacher's perception of her teaching autonomy influences the implementation of policies, reform initiatives and mandates. This means the theory developed here of a role-identity nature of teaching autonomy should be applicable to teachers at any public school. Future projects could be designed to test the applicability of this theory to other sites by interviewing teachers at middle and high schools to add to our understanding of the nature of teaching autonomy from perspectives other than elementary school teachers. Furthermore, future research into the role identity nature of teaching autonomy may reveal other identities used by teachers to construct teaching autonomy when interacting with others in the professional setting. It is likely the eight identities revealed by the ten study participants are not

exhaustive of the possible role identities teachers may take in situations that call for decision making regarding their classroom and students. It is also likely that future research as suggested in this chapter could refine the role identity theory of teaching autonomy presented here and determine a way of identifying for those who work with teachers which roles and identities specific teachers are using. This information could then be used to plan for professional development. For instance, one practical application of the theory could be to identify novice teachers who need assistance with pacing and selection of content and provide those teachers with a curriculum document like the instructional planning guides mentioned in the study. Once a teacher was determined to be operating beyond the novice identity and more comfortable with making decisions regarding pacing and selection of content, she could be given more freedom to exercise professional judgment in these areas. By allowing teachers to exercise teaching autonomy from the role identity of the professional, a level of respect for their ability to make decisions is communicated and the teachers develop a sense of confidence for their future decision making.

*Teaching Autonomy and Professionalism*

Based on the results of this study, the profession of teaching should not aspire to have the same kind of professional autonomy that is afforded to doctors and lawyers (whether those professions actually have a pure form of autonomy is a question for a different study). This conclusion is based on the findings of the study that reveal teaching autonomy cannot be conferred to teachers simply through the act of obtaining a teaching certificate and license to practice in a state. Teachers who enter the field of public education should not expect to have control over many of the decisions that affect

their classrooms and students. Instead, the ability to act as authority over making the decisions important to her classroom is better understood through an interactionist perspective. This key finding, combined with the discovery that teaching autonomy is a phenomenon constructed by teachers as they interact with other professionals within the realm of public education, supports the conclusion that teaching autonomy is actively constructed or deferred, not professionally conferred. Because teachers professional work environments include competing governance structures of autocracy, bureaucracy and democracy, the construct of teaching autonomy must be understood from these different perspectives. This multi-governance feature of the public school environment makes it difficult to use a set of fixed descriptors, like Pearson and Hall's (1993) Teaching Autonomy Scale to measure teachers' perceptions of teaching autonomy. A single score on a scale, such as the one used in the study, does not reveal how teachers shift beliefs about teaching autonomy based on the situation presented, and whether they are operating from a position of individual, collaborative, or sublimated authority. This finding led to the conclusion that teaching autonomy is a state of being requiring that actors shift roles and identities based on the situation. This finding has implications for future studies that seek to understand teaching autonomy using a quantitative measure. The role identity theory of teaching autonomy presented in this study could be used as a predictive tool that researchers and practitioners could use to determine how involved teachers perceive themselves to be in the critical decision making processes concerning the achievement of students for which they are held accountable.

## Policy Implications of a Role Identity Theory of Teaching Autonomy

If teachers actively construct teaching autonomy through shifting roles called upon by the situation, then those concerned with public education may use this information to determine how a particular reform initiative, top-down mandate or other policy may be received and implemented. Understanding how the varying governance structures characteristic of public education impacts the interactions between teachers and other stakeholders could influence the success of initiatives, mandates and policies. For instance, cultivating situations that would allow teachers to operate from the ruled role identity of supporter, which requires use of democratic governance structures found in public schools, such as teaming and professional learning communities, allows teachers to be included in decision making. Teachers were found to give up individual authority over classroom decisions in favor of group authority where the teachers work together to analyze student work and reflect on their practices with a goal of increasing student achievement. The collaborative nature of shared decision making builds the decision-making capacity of individuals as they act within the group. Teachers also favored working collaboratively as a time saving activity. Novice and less experienced teachers are exposed to the knowledge and expertise of other members of the team who are practiced veterans. School leaders and others concerned with public education should recognize the value in building opportunities for teachers to engage with colleagues to make the important decisions that ultimately affect student achievement. Building capacity for individual authority through the democratic process of shared decision making allows teachers to utilize the role identity of the supporter, a stance that is more likely to have teachers implement programs, policies and reforms as mandated.

Bureaucratic governance structures in public schools create situations where teachers operate from the ruled role identities of the pacifist and the follower, as well as the ruler role identities of the critic, and the activist. This study showed that teachers who are subjected to top down reform initiatives, mandates or other policies for which they have no input, or for which they do not agree, or understand are likely to adopt one of these identities to mediate the need for exercising personal authority over classroom decisions. Because of this, school leaders and other stakeholders should be aware of how external authorities present initiatives to teachers and how they subsequently implement reforms, mandates and policies in the public schools. In this study, teachers identified situations where reforms were implemented in a bureaucratic, one-size-fits-all fashion, and teachers performed role identities that allowed them to reconcile conflicting ideas regarding what is best for their students and continue to exercise teaching autonomy while not implementing the reform, as intended. In some cases, it could be argued that the students benefit when reforms are not implemented as intended, as in the Reading First Program at Palomares. Teachers who described acts of resistance to the curricular reform made decisions to alter and vary from the scripted program for students performing at higher or lower levels than what the lesson prescribed. School reform policies, mandates and reform initiatives should be analyzed for a one-size-fits-all implementation structure like the Reading First Program. These types of programs are likely to create problems with implementation arising from the professionalism of teachers who are capable of making better decisions about how to achieve the program goals. Teachers are expected to know better than external authorities exactly what their students need in order to progress in the curriculum. Teachers understand that students of

varying abilities, knowledge, skills, cultures, and attitudes about learning populate their public school classrooms. This research indicates teachers will exert individual authority in some way when faced with conflicting belief over the bureaucratic decisions of external authorities.

Conflict in organizations is naturally part of the change process as external authorities try to impose new programs with good intentions, which may happen to be ill conceived. Teachers serve an important oversight function in the process of implementing reform initiatives, mandates or policies that are imposed with the goal of benefiting students. It is through the role of the dissenting voice that democratic processes are retained in the public school and through the exchange of ideas furthers the knowledge of best practices that promote student achievement. School leaders and others concerned with public education should bear in mind the process of questioning, critiquing and advocating that is described by teachers using the stances of the activist and critic are critical to the change process. School leaders should listen to teachers who are exercising individual authority over the decisions that yield teaching autonomy which are in conflict with top down initiatives imposed by external authority. Teachers who work in an environment where open and honest dialogue is an expectation of the governance structure are more likely to work with school leaders to move the organization towards change promoted by the initiative, mandate or policy.

### Implications of Leadership Style and Worldview on Teaching Autonomy

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974; 1978) offer an explanation for the findings of this study with implications for other researchers who wish to study teaching autonomy. Their theory of organizational behavior described by Model 1 and Model 2

action strategies is indicative of the action plans described by teachers in the study as they sought to have control within the organization over the decisions important to their classrooms. Though the theory is not new, the major premise that actors in organizations operate from an interactionist perspective is relevant to this theory of teaching autonomy. Specifically, Argyris and Schön contend,

> When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories (Argyris and Schön, 1978, pp. 6-7).

This theory offers one possible explanation of why teachers may rate their teaching autonomy high on a questionnaire measure, which is indicative of their espoused theory of action, while describe conflicting and contradictory actions in the interview transcript that describe the actual theories in use regarding teaching autonomy. In their work with school leaders, Argyris and Schön identified two models that appear to act as governing variables in the relationships among individuals on school campuses. The two models, called Model 1 and Model 2, indicate a specific worldview adopted by the school leaders when interacting with others on the campus. Leaders operating from the governing variables of a Model 1 worldview have a competitive and defensive stance towards the world. These leaders tend to produce in others adversarial and defensive action

strategies, which lead to poor relationships and what, they termed as single-loop learning for the organization. "In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing values" (ibid). The existing governing values for Model 1 are to "achieve the purposes as the actor perceives them, maximize winning and minimize losing, minimize eliciting negative feelings, and be rational and minimize emotionality" (Argyris, 1982, p.86). Leaders who operate from Model 1 cultivate the culture on school campuses of superiors and subordinates in the workplace. Teachers who have been trained under the leadership style of Model 1 are not encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions. Situations are created where teachers are expected to confer authority to external powers. In this study, handing teachers a curricular reform document, as in the Instructional Planning Guides or the TEKS, and expecting them to follow it without question is characteristic of Model 1 leadership style. When teachers act in the Model 1 organization they use the ruled role identity action plans of the follower, the novice and the pacifist regarding what approach they will take over making important classroom decisions that varies or aligns with what they have been told to do. These action plans work to maintain and sustain the use of the Model 1 worldview.

School leaders who operate from a Model 2 worldview lead organizations that are more productive and conducive to learning. This is because the governing values for a Model 2 worldview are "valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment to the choice, and constant monitoring of the implementation" (Argyris, 1982, p 102). Note the difference between constant monitoring *for the implementation* is different from constant monitoring *of the implementation*. In a Model 2 school culture, a

democratic leadership style utilizes shared decision making teams using valid information to make important classroom decisions. Often, the key decisions regarding teaching and learning are decided through leadership cadres and collaborative teams. The District initiative to implement Professional Learning Communities asks teachers to come together to make decisions about student work and achievement. In this process teachers actively monitor the *implementation of* the PLC initiative. This contrasts with the Reading First Program initiative at Palomares, which is monitored *for implementation* by external authorities. Teachers who questioned the Reading First program were seen from an adversarial view, rather than from a position of considering the questioning as valid information and feedback from the teacher about the implementation. Teachers who work in a Model 2 environment are expected to have free and informed choice, a tenet central to being able to act with autonomy in a given situation. In addition, teachers who operate from a stance that includes internal commitment to the choice will be more productive than teachers who have no internal commitment. According to Argyris and Schön, Model 2 leadership is rare in schools; however, there was evidence in this study that teachers at both campuses do have opportunities to engage, at times, in a learning organization that is seeking to operate more consensually. Model 2 organizations seek to challenge the constancy of governing variables that a Model 1 organization wishes to keep constant. Model 2 organizations engage in what Argyris and Schön have called double-loop learning. “In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself" (Argyris and Schön, 1974, p.19). Double-loop learning is that which moves the organization because it involves adaptation and modification of the governing variables. Leaders who operate from a Model 2 worldview are likely to cultivate an environment

where teachers may take the ruler role identities of activist, critic, and professional and the ruled role identity of supporter for these action plans involve teachers exercising individual and group authority over classroom decisions. In the Model 2 organization,

> Valid information is sought about actual performance. There is public testing of this information and public questioning of the basic goals of the personnel function (Argyris, 1982b, p.19). Threatening issues are surfaced and dealt with openly and honestly. There is a deliberate attempt to minimize camouflage of error. In effect, a dialectic is created; the open expression of dissent allows the identification of new goals and new responses (Argyris, 1982a, p.106). Double-loop learning is achieved.

Implications of Argyris and Schöen' s research on this study of teaching autonomy are that teachers may be inclined to operate from certain role identities in Model 1 organizations and other role identities in Model 2 organizations. How teachers operate to exercise individual authority over classroom decisions and construct teaching autonomy may depend on the leadership style of those working directly in the school, as well as the style of external authorities that influence the school operations. Future research could combine the theory of Argyris & Schöen with this role-identity theory of teaching autonomy to study whether this assertion holds true.

*Summary & Final Conclusions*

Initially, I predicted that TAS scores would be lower for the teachers at Palomares Elementary School. This prediction was based on knowledge of the imposed constraints on teaching autonomy by elements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* together with the distinction of being labeled a Title I campus and a Focus School, which makes the

campus vulnerable to outside mandates and top-down decision making. In addition to the macropolitical influences on teaching autonomy, the Palomares teachers are further influenced by state, district and campus initiatives and mandates that limit a teacher's ability to make professional judgments regarding classroom instruction and student achievement. The staff at Overton Elementary, on the other hand, are not subjected to the legislative teeth of the NCLB act because the campus does not receive Title I funds; therefore, I predicted their teaching autonomy scores would be higher, having less outside influence on their teaching autonomy. Additionally, Overton is considered a high achieving campus in the district, and the outside spheres of influence that act to limit a teacher's autonomy do not penetrate the school in the same way as at Palomares.

Through use of a quantitative measure to sort teachers for selection for interviewing, I found that my assumptions were only partially confirmed in the analysis of the quantitative data. Using classical grounded theory method, the inconsistencies and contradictions suggested by the quantitative results were explained by understanding teaching autonomy as a state of being that is determined by the situation, and the teacher's selection of a stance she takes regarding the exercise of individual authority for the situation. These stances were determined to be related to whether the teacher believed she could take an active role in asserting her authority, or whether a passive role was needed for the situation. These two stances were typified as a ruler role, or a ruled role, which speak to the complex governance structures in public schools that expect teachers to act as both ruler over their classroom and to comply with external authority in a passive role as subordinate to a superior. Teachers construct teaching autonomy through the various stances identified in this study, rather than previously contended that

teaching autonomy is professionally conferred to teachers and can be measured as a fixed score on a set of indicators. Instead, this research places teaching autonomy within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1966; Mead, 1934) and role-identity theory (McCall & Simons, 1966). This is a different conceptualization of teaching autonomy, as a state of being, which is by nature, transitory and shifting and directed the development of this original theory of teaching autonomy. This study offers a different understanding that better explains how the phenomenon of teaching autonomy is enacted and operates on school campuses. In addition to offering a different conceptualization of teaching autonomy, this study recommends that leadership styles of those working in the public school system be explored for the ways that impact teaching autonomy, and for the worldview of the leadership style regarding the teacher's place as authority over the important decisions that affect her students and her classroom. Schools that operate as learning organizations cultivate teaching autonomy and value the professional input of teachers concerning decisions that impact the classroom and student achievement. Schools that operate bureaucratically do not necessarily value a teacher's input into decision-making and this is reflected in the methods teachers choose to exert individual authority over the top-down decisions imposed by external authority. Therefore, the final conclusion of this study is teaching autonomy is a phenomenon that must be understood from an interactionist perspective alongside the characteristics of the organization in which teachers work.

# Appendix A. Informed Consent

Title: The ruler and the ruled: Complicating a theory of teaching autonomy
IRB PROTOCOL # 2006-08-0050
Conducted By: Sherry Ann Lepine of The University of Texas at Austin: Department of Educational Administration
Telephone: (512) 841-6708 office, (512) 442-8523 home.
Faculty Supervisor: Stuart Reifel, PhD. Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Educational Administration Fellow (512) 232-2289, (512) 232-4500.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current for future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

**The purpose of this study** is to obtain a measure of your perception of your teaching autonomy by using an 18-item questionnaire called the Teaching Autonomy Scale. Some teachers who respond to the questionnaire will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to help us better understand how teachers perceive their autonomy - the ability to make decisions regarding their professional work with students.

**If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:**

- Fill out an 18-item questionnaire called the Teaching Autonomy Scale
- If selected for the follow-up interview, agree to meet the researcher at a mutually agreed upon neutral location to answer questions about your teaching autonomy.

**Total estimated time to participate** in study is 15 minutes for the questionnaire. If selected for the follow up interview an additional one-hour will be used to conduct the interview and no more than one-hour at a later time will be needed to review the researcher's analysis of the interview and provide feedback for accuracy of the researcher's analysis of your interview data.

**Risks** of being in the study are minimal. There are no anticipated risks that are beyond the risks of everyday life.

**Benefits** of being in the study - you will provide information that will expand the knowledge base regarding how teachers perceive their autonomy and how this perception influences their professional lives with students.

**Compensation:** This study will not provide compensation. Participation is on a voluntary basis**.**

**Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

Teachers who participate in taking the Teaching Autonomy Scale questionnaire will provide a name and phone number in case they will be selected for a follow-up interview. This information will only be gathered to facilitate interview selection. If the participant is not selected for the interview, the questionnaire will be assigned a number and no link to the

teacher's name and phone number will be needed or referred to in any way. This information will be deleted as soon as the interview pool of candidates has been determined. The researcher will contact those teachers selected to participate in the follow-up interview and the following will apply to those who are selected for interviews:

- *interviews will be audio taped;*
- *tapes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them;*
- *tapes will be kept in a secure place (e.g., a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office);*
- *tapes will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator and his or her associates;*
- *tapes will be erased after they are transcribed or coded.*

- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 232-2685 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

## Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

**Signature of Investigator:** _____

# Appendix B. Scoring Directions for the Teaching Autonomy Scale

The autonomy instrument has been refined to 18 items and should function well. There are two subscales: general autonomy and curricular autonomy. The general autonomy scale is obtained by adding items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17; the curricular autonomy scale is obtained by adding items 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 18. Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 all need to be recoded to receive the high score on the attribute. You may, instead of using the subscales, use a total score; however, to avoid singularity, be sure to use only one or the other.

# Appendix C. Teaching Autonomy Scale

TEACHING AUTONOMY SCALE (Pearson & Hall, 1993)

1 - Definitely true
2 - More or less true
3 - More or less false
4 - Definitely false

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | I am free to be creative in my teaching approach | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. | The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. | Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by myself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. | My job does not allow for much discretion on my part. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. | In my teaching I use my own guidelines and procedures. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. | In my situation I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. | The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. | My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. | I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. | I follow my own guidelines on instruction. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. | In my situation I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. | What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 13. | In my class I have little control over how classroom space is used. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. | The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by myself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. | The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by people other than myself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. | I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 17. | I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. | The content and skills taught in my class are those I select. | 1 2 3 4 |

# Appendix D. Teaching Autonomy Interview Protocol

This interview is being conducted to fulfill requirements for original research and will be used to complete a doctoral dissertation for the University of Texas at Austin. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed.

This research is being conducted to determine perceptions of teaching autonomy in the current climate of accountability. First I want to define some of the words I am using so we have a common understanding of the way I am using the word.

- Autonomy- the freedom to act and make decisions regarding your professional practice
- Agency - the ability to take action
- Authority – the power to act
- Efficacy – the belief that your teaching abilities and skills creates desirable learning outcomes for students

Tell me about your current teaching assignment and your students.

Tell me how you know your students are achieving.

What are some ways you measure their achievement?

How much control do you have over student achievement in your classroom?

If a student were not achieving what are some things you would try?

In what ways are you held accountable for student achievement?

Tell me about your freedom and discretion to make curricular decisions based on student needs.

Tell me how you select the learning activities that will occur in your classroom.

Tell me how standards for classroom behavior are set at your campus.

Tell what guidelines (and/or procedures) you use in your teaching.

Tell me how you select content and skills for teaching.

Tell me how your time is scheduled (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly).

Tell me about the goals and objectives you select for teaching –where dop those come from?

Tell me how key decisions that affect your students are made on your campus and about the input you feel you have.

Tell me how you use creative methods when you teach.

Tell me about any mandates that influence your professional autonomy. (Required in-service, mandated curriculum, required benchmark testing)

Tell me something that has happened at your school that you think is a direct result of accountability to NCLB policy and how it has affected your autonomy.

How do you manage campus and district initiatives in your day-to-day practice?

Tell me about what you think has the most influence on your teaching practice.

Are there ever times when you feel as if you are compromising your beliefs about what is important in order to comply with a directive, initiative, or mandate? Tell me about the situation.

Ending Questions:

Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that I asked you to think about in this interview?

Is there anything else you think I should know or understand about your teaching autonomy?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

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# VITA

Sherry Ann Lepine completed high school at Stephen F. Austin High School in Austin, Texas in 1978 and entered the University of Texas at Austin where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1984. She worked in Austin as an interior designer until she entered the University of Texas at Austin in 1989 to obtain a teaching certificate. While earning a teaching certificate, she also earned a Master's degree in August of 1993 from the College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Early Childhood Education. During the following years she worked in the field of education as an elementary school teacher and taught pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first and third grades. In 2001, Ms. Lepine was selected to be trained as a principal in the School Leadership Academy, a partnership between the Austin Independent School District and The University of Texas at Austin, where she completed 51 hours of coursework and earned her Principal's Certificate in February of 2003. During that time, she was accepted as a doctoral student in the Public School Executive Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin. She has continued to work fulltime as an assistant principal at both the elementary and middle school levels, while completing coursework in the Educational Administration doctoral portfolio program, Educational Policy and Planning, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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